

A HISTORY OF THE NEWFOUNDLAND FEDERATION
OF LABOUR, 1936-1963

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A HISTORY OF THE NEWFOUNDLAND FEDERATION
OF LABOUR, 1936 - 1963



by
WILLIAM EARLE GILLESPIE, B.A.

A Thesis Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of
the Requirements for the Degree of
Master of Arts

February, 1980

St. John's

Newfoundland

ABSTRACT

Throughout its history the Newfoundland Federation of Labour has pursued two primary goals — to spread trade union organization and to lobby government to adopt legislation favourable to the interests of working people. The degree to which the Federation has been successful has depended upon the quality and dedication of its leadership, economic conditions and the willingness of government to be influenced. An unstable, rural economy delayed the emergence of a Newfoundland Labour Movement until the mid-1930s. Once it did emerge, however, Newfoundland workers responded enthusiastically. The NFL's founding meeting in 1937 at Grand Falls was followed by a country-wide organizing drive. Despite a six year lull caused by World War II, by the late 1940s the Newfoundland labour force was the most highly organized in North America. Unlike their counterparts in Britain, however, Newfoundland trade unionists were unable to translate their numerical strength into political power. The explanation lies in a combination of the NFL's relationship to sections of the North American Labour Movement opposed to direct political action, divisions within the Newfoundland Labour Movement, and a set of political circumstances unique to Newfoundland.

Although the NFL was a national labour central until Confederation with Canada in 1949, it was dominated by unions affiliated to the American Federation of Labour. The AFL's opposition to direct political action is well documented. However, in a country with strong ties to Great Britain the success of the British Labour Party provided

an alternate model. Even so, there were only two serious attempts between 1937 and 1963 to emulate British practice. For the most part the NFL was less "political" than even the AFL. Initially this was because from 1933 to 1949 Newfoundland was governed by a commission of civil servants appointed by Britain. In a country without a system of electoral politics, direct political action did not seem a pressing concern. When electoral politics were restored and J.R. Smallwood became premier of Canada's tenth province, Smallwood granted the NFL almost every request it made for legislative reform. As a result the NFL saw no need to develop an independent political base in order to guarantee its influence with government. The fault with this approach was demonstrated during the IWA Strike of 1959. Smallwood suddenly turned against the Federation and without a political base of its own the NFL was powerless to protect the interests of Labour. Smallwood's subsequent attacks on the NFL sent it into a ten year period of decline; however, it is the thesis of this dissertation that the NFL's failure to give sufficient weight to the changed environment brought about by the return to electoral politics was as much the cause of its decline as any external factor.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Many individuals and institutions have contributed to the completion of this thesis; however, my greatest debt is to the faculty and staff of the Department of History at Memorial University. The Department created courses specifically tailored to my needs and interests and every faculty member called upon for assistance responded generously. This was particularly true of my supervisors. The late Dr. Ian McDonald who taught me the required research and writing skills; Dr. David Alexander who helped shape the research and provided the critical insight and encouragement needed to bring the thesis to completion; and Dr. Jim Tague who oversaw the final revision. A debt, almost as great, is owed the many Newfoundland trade unionists who shared their time and files with me and to whom this thesis is dedicated. Also I would like to thank Donna Butt who loaned me her research and interviews on the IWA Strike. Although it is customary to express gratitude for financial aid provided by the university and government, I cannot do so. The fellowships provided by Memorial University are meagre indeed, and are particularly discouraging for married people who wish to participate in graduate studies programs. Finally, I would like to acknowledge the patience, support and understanding of my family. To my wife Roberta and my children Mark and Jennifer who sacrificed many weekends with their husband and father, many thanks. I alone, of course, must be held responsible for the views expressed in this thesis and for any errors or shortcomings in the text.

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

AFL ... American Federation of Labor
AND Company ... Anglo-Newfoundland Development Company
BCC ... Building Crafts Council
BF & E ... Brotherhood of Firemen and Engineers
BRC ... Brotherhood of Railway Clerks, Freight Handlers and
Station Employees
BRT ... Brotherhood of Railway Trainmen
BWPU ... Buchans Workmens' Protective Union
CCF ... Co-operative Commonwealth Federation
CCL ... Canadian Congress of Labour
CLC ... Canadian Labour Congress
FPU ... Fishermens' Protective Union
IAM ... International Association of Machinists
IBC ... International Brotherhood of Carmen
IBEW ... International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers
IBPM ... International Brotherhood of Paper Makers
IBPS & PMW ... International Brotherhood of Pulp, Sulphite, and
Paper Mill Workers
ILO ... International Labour Organization
IWA ... International Woodworkers of America
JTUA ... Journeymen Tailors' Union of America
LSPU ... Longshoremens' Protective Union
MHA ... Member of the House of Assembly
MP ... Member of Parliament

NBW ... Newfoundland Brotherhood of Wood Workers
 NDP ... Newfoundland Democratic Party
 NDP ... New Democratic Party
 NFL ... Newfoundland Federation of Labour
 NGEA ... Newfoundland Government Employees Association
 NIWA ... Newfoundland Industrial Workers Association
 NLA ... Newfoundland Lumbermens' Association
 NLU ... Newfoundland Labourers' Union
 NNP ... Newfoundland National Party
 NPASOE ... Newfoundland Protective Association of Shop and
 Office Employees
 NTLC ... Newfoundland Trades and Labour Council
 ORT ... Order of Railway Telegraphers
 RCMP ... Royal Canadian Mounted Police
 SJDLP ... St. John's District Labour Party
 SJDTLC ... St. John's District Trades and Labour Council
 SJTLC ... St. John's Trades and Labour Council
 TLC ... Trades and Labour Council of Canada
 TPU ... Truckmens' Protective Union
 TUC ... Trade Union Congress
 UBCJ ... United Brotherhood of Carpenters and Joiners
 USA ... United States of America
 USWA ... United Steel Workers of America
 WCPU ... Workers' Central Protective Union

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

It is perhaps only natural that those who take the greatest care to leave for posterity the most complete records should be remembered best, or, at least first.¹

In Newfoundland, as elsewhere, it has been those in politics, government and business — generally those whose work depends upon the written word who have left us the most accessible record of their activities. As a consequence, a large part of Newfoundland's history remains untold. We know little of the lives and achievements of labouring Newfoundlanders. What little we do know, focuses on workers engaged in the fishery but in addition to being fishermen, Newfoundlanders have worked as loggers, railway workers, paper makers, clerks, carpenters, electricians, teachers, and at a variety of other occupations. Like other workers, Newfoundlanders attempted to protect and advance their interests in the workplace by forming trade unions. But with the exception of the Fishermens' Protective Union [FPU], which has been extensively studied by the late Dr. Ian McDonald and Mr. John Feltham, the history of the Newfoundland Trade Union Movement has been largely ignored.

The extent of the neglect can be seen in the fact that the only published account which attempts to survey Newfoundland Trade

¹Russell G. Hann et al., Primary Sources in Canadian Working Class History 1860-1930 (Kitchener: Dumont Press, 1973), p. 9.

Unionism from beginning to end is contained in the introduction to the 1972 report of the *Royal Commission on Labour Legislation in Newfoundland and Labrador*.² Beyond this there is the unpublished manuscript by Rolf Hattenhauer, "A Brief Labour History of Newfoundland," which formed the basis of the historical overview in the Royal Commission cited above, and an unpublished Master's thesis by E.B. Akyeampong entitled "Labour Laws and the Development of the Labour Movement in Newfoundland, 1900-1960."³ The rest of Newfoundland's labour history is scattered throughout newspapers, books and magazines in the form of journalistic commentaries and news stories. The absence of any substantial account of the development of trade unionism in Newfoundland is therefore the primary justification for this thesis and an explanation of its largely narrative character. In choosing to focus on trade unionism, the author is aware that he is running counter to the recent trend towards social or 'working' class labour history. The trend is one which the author supports; but before a meaningful study of the Newfoundland working class can proceed, it is necessary to establish a chronological framework, and the socio-political context in which events of significance to the working class took place. That is too large an undertaking for a study at this level. Therefore the thesis concentrates on the history of one key working class institution — the Newfoundland Federation of Labour.

² Maxwell Cohen, Q.C., Report of the Royal Commission on Labour Legislation in Newfoundland and Labrador (St. John's: Queen's Printer, 1972), pp. 70-182.

³ Ernest Bugya Akyeampong, "Labour Laws and the Development of the Labour Movement in Newfoundland, 1900-1960" (unpublished Master's thesis, Memorial University of Newfoundland, 1967).

The Federation is a suitable topic for study for several reasons. First, since it is Newfoundland's oldest central labour organization, the NFL has been involved in most of the important events of Newfoundland's Labour history. Secondly, by their very nature, central labour organizations encompass a diversity of trade union organizations and opinions. That being so a study of the Federation is an ideal focus from which to gain an insight into the character, scope, and development of the Newfoundland Labour Movement.

Beyond those specifics, however, there is a more general reason for focusing on the Federation. Although in recent years the Labour Movement has asserted itself as a force in the economic, social and political life of Newfoundland, there still is (and always has been) the impression among most Newfoundlanders that the development of trade unionism here lagged far behind the rest of North America — that somehow the Labour Movement in Newfoundland was weaker than in Canada and the United States. It will be the second major objective of this thesis to show that that supposition is incorrect. Although initially some facets of the Newfoundland Labour Movement did develop more slowly than the rest of North America, in many cases the Newfoundland Labour Movement was more advanced — an achievement due in large part to the trade unionists who led the NFL. In part, the mistaken impression concerning the strength of the Movement has been the result of inadequate statistical records and the absence of historical research. Just as important, however, has been the nature of the Newfoundland Labour Movement itself.

For the most part Newfoundland trade unionists avoided confrontation whenever possible. Whether it was in matters of collective

CHAPTER TWO

EARLY CENTRAL LABOUR ORGANIZATIONS

By the mid-1850s the pattern of Newfoundland's economic, social and political life was firmly established. Based on the fishery, it was a social system with well defined lines of religious and economic authority.¹ In each community the merchant was the pivotal figure in what was virtually an extended economic family unit, a position simultaneously exploitative and supportive. The merchant profited financially in his role as supplier and creditor to the fishermen dependent upon him for the necessities of life. This position of importance in turn made the merchant the power broker and lobbyist for the community in its dealings with the outside world, especially as it related to the political process. The religious community was the moral watchdog of the system, preaching from the pulpit and instructing in denominationally-controlled schools the doctrines of order, caution and respect. These factors, and the dispersed pattern of fishery settlement, combined to ensure the rural labouring class remained dependent upon the church and the ruling merchants. That was also true in the city of St. John's where the lack of large-scale industry retarded the creation of a class of wage earners organized into trade unions which could defend the interests of working people. Nonetheless, the desire

¹Kenneth Kerr, "A Social Analysis of the Members of the House of Assembly, Executive Council and Legislative Council for 1855-1914" (unpublished Master's thesis, Memorial University of Newfoundland, 1978), p. 352.

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bargaining, union jurisdiction, or legislative lobbying, Newfoundland's labour leaders tried to achieve their goals through conciliation and compromise. That conciliatory attitude has often been mistaken for weakness, when, if one judges against standards such as the degree of influence Labour managed to exert on government policy or the numbers of workers organized per capita, the achievements of Newfoundland trade unionists compare favourably with the achievements of other North American trade unionists.

The final thrust of the thesis will deal with an area in which the Newfoundland Labour Movement, led by the Newfoundland Federation of Labour, failed — in dealing with political power and its consequences upon union activity. As with other central labour organizations, the nature and extent of Labour's political involvement was the subject of a recurring debate. For reasons brought forward in the thesis, the Federation choose to adopt a policy of political neutrality. It is the thesis of this study that that policy was the underlying cause of a crippling defeat suffered by the Federation and the Labour Movement in 1959 — a defeat which weakened Newfoundland trade unions and to some extent is responsible for creating the impression that until recent times, the Newfoundland Labour Movement was not a significant force in the social, political and economic life of Newfoundland.

by workingmen to combine to protect their collective interests appeared very early in Newfoundland's history.

There had been some settlement in the country since the sixteenth century but it was not until the disruption caused by the Napoleonic Wars that St. John's evolved from a fishing village into the colony's first city. By 1815 St. John's could boast its own post office, a newspaper, a grammar school, two charity schools and dozens of coffee houses and taverns.² A sufficiently large population existed to support a small class of artisans. In 1827 these tradesmen founded the Mechanics' Society, which was a body of tradesmen rather than a trade union, but exhibited many of the characteristics of later central labour organization.³ In that year Newfoundland was in the trough of a severe depression that extended from 1815 to 1830. Civil strife in salt fish importing countries, higher duties on the import of Newfoundland fish, and increasingly successful competition from Scandinavian fish products created a desperate economic situation in which almost everyone in Newfoundland suffered, including tradesmen.⁴ There were at the most 800 tradesmen in St. John's at the time. No one trade was large enough to form an organization which could ameliorate the effects of the depression and the trades banded together to form a common

²S.J.R. Noel, Politics in Newfoundland (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1970), p. 5.

³The Royal Gazette, March 4, 1827. At the time the Mechanics' Society was founded the term 'mechanic' had a less specific meaning than it does today. In 1827 the term referred to all skilled tradesmen, not just those who manufactured or maintained machinery.

⁴Keith Matthews, "The Reformers of 1832" (lecture presented to the Newfoundland Historical Society, January 1973), p. 11.

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organization.⁵ Led by a cooper, Lawrence Barron, they formed the Mechanics' Society; a benefit society similar to those established in Britain. Its aim was to provide financial help to brother members in time of sickness and a decent burial at death.⁶

The Mechanics' Society was not strictly-speaking a working class organization. It was composed of men who occupied a position midway between the upper class of merchants, clergy, and civil servants and the unskilled labouring class. Its membership included journeymen coopers, carpenters, blacksmiths, accountants and middle-level civil servants as well as tradesmen who were minor employers of labour.⁷ One of their number, Patrick Kough, even rose to become a member of the House of Assembly. But as far as the mechanics were concerned, and certainly in the opinion of the upper class, they were working people never far from poverty in the context of an unstable economy. The Mechanics' Society was a comforting form of insurance against that eventuality, but as the number of tradesmen in St. John's increased some of the trades became large enough to form another type of self-help organization — the trade union.

⁵The Newfoundlander, April 2, 1828.

⁶Francis Williams, Magnificent Journey - The Rise of the Trade Unions (London: Odhams Press, 1954), p. 15.

⁷"A List of the Names of Prominent People at the Time Newfoundland was Granted Responsible Government" (St. John's: Mimeographed, 1971). Reprint by the Provincial Archives of a list of Jurors and Petty Jurors in St. John's in 1833. Seven of the twelve executive members of the 1830 Mechanics' Society are included in the list. Located at the Provincial Archives, St. John's, Newfoundland.

By the late 1870s seal-skimmers, coopers, tailors, joiners, and retail clerks had all established trade unions.⁸ Like unions today, the basic objectives were higher wages, shorter hours and improved working conditions, although each union determined its own priorities. The Seal Skinners Union, for instance, met at the end of each sealing season to set their piece rates for the next year.⁹ The chief concern of the retail clerks was working conditions, since clerks were sometimes required to work up to eighty-four hours a week.¹⁰ The Coopers' Society feared the possibility of a shortage of work and attempted to regulate the number of apprentices entering the trade.¹¹

These early unions were typical of the working class organizations that emerged in the early industrial phase of the British, American and Canadian economies. The major difference in trade union development in Newfoundland resulted from the pace of industrial expansion.¹² Newfoundland lagged far behind in this respect and consequently so did trade union development. Attempts to form 'combinations' to regulate wages and working conditions were made by

⁸ Cohen, Royal Commission, p. 149; James J. Fogarty, "The Newfoundland Seal-Skinners Union," in The Book of Newfoundland, II, ed. by J.R. Smallwood (St. John's: Newfoundland Book Publishers Limited, 1937), p. 202; The Newfoundlander, January 8, 1857, March 8, 1858.

⁹ Fogarty, "The Seal-Skinners," p. 202.

¹⁰ The Newfoundlander, January 8, 1857.

¹¹ H.M. Mosdell, When Was That? (St. John's: Trade Printers and Publishers Limited, 1923; reprinted by Robinson-Blackmore Limited, 1974), p. 52.

¹² G.D.H. Cole, A Short History of the British Working Class Movement 1789-1947 (London: G. Allen and Unwin, 1952), p. 6.

workers in Britain as early as the sixteenth century.¹³ In the United States the same stage of development occurred in the early 1700s and in Canada in the early 1800s.¹⁴ It was not until the late 1870s that a small number of 'combinations' appeared in Newfoundland. During the early industrial phase the number of trade unions in each country was relatively small but increased rapidly with industrialization. In Britain this happened in the early 1800s, in the United States in the 1850s, and in Canada in the 1890s.¹⁵

Newfoundland remained a largely non-industrial fishing economy until the 1930s although some diversification did take place towards the end of the nineteenth century.¹⁶ In 1884, of the 73,796 workers in the labour force, only 14.7 percent were in occupations which normally provided fertile ground for unionism.¹⁷ Of those, two percent were in lumbering, 0.5 percent were in mining, 2.2 percent in shop labour or clerical occupations, and five percent in the trades. The remaining five percent, designated by the census as 'others' were

¹³Cole, A Short History, p. 61.

¹⁴Foster Rhea Dulles, Labor in America (New York: Crowell, 1960), p. 53; H.A. Logan, Trade Unions in Canada (Toronto: The Macmillan Company of Canada Limited, 1948), p. 23.

¹⁵Henry Pelling, A History of British Trade Unionism (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1973), p. 89; Joseph G. Rayback, A History of American Labor (New York: The Free Press, 1966), p. 47; Charles Lipton, The Trade Union Movement of Canada 1827-1959 (Toronto: NC Press, 1973), p. 79.

¹⁶David Alexander, "Newfoundland's Traditional Economy and Development to 1934," Acadiensis, V, No. 2 (Spring 1976), 56.

¹⁷Alexander, "Traditional Economy," 68, Table 4.

probably in transportation, communications, public utilities, and construction. The remaining 85.6 percent of the labour force consisted of professionals (0.4 percent), fishermen (eighty-two percent), farmers (two percent), and merchants and traders (1.2 percent). By the mid-1890s the fisheries labour force had reached the limit of its expansion.¹⁸ From that point on, growth in the Newfoundland economy was the result of expansion in modern resource industries and associated secondary and service industries. From 1884 to 1891 the proportion of the labour force engaged in fishing and farming dropped from eighty-four percent to seventy percent. Simultaneously, the labour force in the mining, lumbering, construction, transportation, manufacturing and service industries rose from 16.3 percent to 29.9 percent. Reflecting this shift wheelwrights, tanners, boilermakers, blacksmiths, painters, tailors, bakers, coopers, clerks, teachers, telegraphers, miners, bricklayers, plasterers, and sailmakers all made attempts in the 1890s at forming, and sometimes re-forming, unions.¹⁹ With the rise of trade unions came the first attempts to form central labour organizations which could, among other things, act as lobbies for the organized working class.

Between 1893 and 1907 there were four attempts in St. John's to form a labour central. Although short-lived, they are important as part of the evolutionary process which led to the formation of the Newfoundland Federation of Labour. The first attempt was made in

¹⁸ Alexander, "Traditional Economy," 67.

¹⁹ Cohen, Royal Commission, p. 120.

early February 1893 with the Workingmen's Union of Newfoundland.²⁰ It was an organization much like the Knights of Labour in Canada and the United States, and its statement of principles suggests it was inspired by the Knights.²¹ At a preliminary meeting in the old Fishermen's Hall on Queen Street, the Union adopted a constitution and signed up over 300 members. Its goals were:

1. ... to obtain by all and every peaceful means fair and equitable remuneration throughout the Island for all work and labour performed.
2. ... to use every endeavour to increase the number of occupations by encouraging, in every lawful way, the introduction, opening up, and sustention [*sic*] of new industries throughout the country.
3. ... to return to parliament as representatives only those who shall pledge themselves to carry out the aims and objectives of this institution.
4. ... to gather into one fold all branches of honest toil, without regard to nationality, creed, or colour.
5. ... to assist members to better their condition morally, financially, and socially.
6. ... to use every lawful available and peaceful means to have removed from the statutes of the country any law that in any way obstructs or impedes the way to the goal we intend to reach.²²

²⁰ The Daily Tribune, February 23, 1893.

²¹ Norman J. Ware, The Labor Movement in the United States 1860-1890 (New York: Vintage Books, 1964), p. 382. Not only was the structure of the Workingmen's Union and its general tone similar to the Knights, the Union's statement of principles included a reference to gathering together all workers without regard to nationality, creed or colour. Since the number of 'coloured' workers in Newfoundland at the time was next to none, this likely indicates the principles were copied from another document, probably from the United States.

²² The Daily Tribune, February 23, 1893.

These goals were stated forcefully but the emphasis was clearly on working within the existing socio-political system. The Workingmen's Union even foreswore the use of the strike in any but the most desperate circumstances. It preferred "An amicable settlement of all differences by arbitration...",²³ and given the labour surpluses which existed in St. John's at the time it was a wise policy.

Significant too was the absence of any comprehensive critique of the social and political system. The wave of British and European immigration had by-passed Newfoundland for Canada and the United States.²⁴ As a result the socialist and communist influences many of these immigrants brought to the Canadian and American Labour Movements were absent in Newfoundland.

At first the Workingmen's Union received an enthusiastic response from the St. John's working class. Led by F.J. Kenny, a pipe-fitter, membership increased from 300 in February of 1893 to 625 in March and 700 to 800 in April.²⁵ But almost as quickly as it appeared the Union vanished without a trace. The reason is not clear but organizational inexperience is a likely explanation. Meetings were frequently held in halls too small to accommodate the numbers interested in attending.²⁶ Sometimes meetings were cancelled for no apparent

²³ The Daily Tribune, February 23, 1893.

²⁴ J.C. Crosbie, "Local Government in Newfoundland," Canadian Journal of Economics and Political Science, XXII, No. 3 (1956), 334.

²⁵ The Daily Tribune, February 23, 1893; The Evening Telegram, March 27, April 17, 1893.

²⁶ The Evening Telegram, March 27, 1893.

reason, and once 700 people were left standing outside a meeting hall when the Union's representative could not locate the key.²⁷ Despite its brief existence, however, the Workingmen's Union did indicate the desire of St. John's workers to assert themselves in an association which was more than an isolated trade union. Four years later, in 1897, the attempt to form a central labour body was made again, but this time by the Mechanics' Society.

The bank crash of 1894 pushed the Newfoundland economy into another depression. According to a letter in *The Evening Telegram* one thousand families in St. John's were without food, fuel, clothes, and light owing to the lack of work.²⁸ So great were the financial demands put on the Mechanics' Society that it ran out of money and could not meet the demands made upon its sick benefit program. Compounding the problem was the new hall the Mechanics' had built in the wake of the 1892 fire which had burdened the Society with a debt of \$12,000. In addition the Society lost \$1,500 in the bank crash.²⁹ The one place of good fortune the Society could point to was their choice of a new president in 1895, Thomas M. White.

White was a prominent carriage-maker but had not lost his identification with the working class. His solution to the problems of the workers in general and the Mechanics' Society in particular, was to appeal to all trade unions in St. John's to unite under the banner

²⁷ The Evening Telegram, April 17, 1896.

²⁸ The Evening Telegram, January 14, 1896.

²⁹ The Evening Telegram, February 23, 1897.

of the Mechanics' Society.³⁰ Under this proposal, which became known as the Affiliations Movement, each trade union maintained its separate identity. As the central labour organization, the Mechanics' Society acted as Labour's collective spokesman to government, organized new unions, tried to improve Labour's public image, and provided a forum for the discussion of issues of general concern. Direct trade union action, such as collective bargaining and strikes, was left to the individual unions, but the presence of a central organization was to be a source of moral support.

The response to the proposal was excellent and by early 1897 almost every union in St. John's had joined the Society. In those trades where there were no unions, workers were allowed to join as individuals. In July of the same year the Society presented its new image to the public by staging a huge Labour Day parade in which 1000 workers marched through the streets of St. John's.³¹ The iron moulders, tailors, tanners, boilermakers, sailmakers, masons and bricklayers, shoe-makers, tobacco workers and printers entered floats in this parade, which was met at one point along the route by the Coopers' Union firing guns in salute. It was an impressive introduction for the 'new' Mechanics' Society and for a few years at least the Society lived up to its initial promise. In 1898 it succeeded in lobbying government to protect small manufacturing industries in St. John's by raising the tariff by five percent on certain finished imports while reducing it by

³⁰ The Evening Telegram, February 23, 1897.

³¹ The Evening Telegram, July 15, 1897.

smaller proportions on raw materials imported for manufacturing purposes. In 1899, at their request, a Boiler Inspection Act was passed.³² But as relative economic prosperity reasserted itself the sense of urgency which had been the impetus for the Affiliations Movement evaporated and the trade unions began to drift away. After two successful parades, Labour Day celebrations were reduced to annual outings of 250 to 300 members. Members made fewer requests to the Society's legislative committee for representations to government.³³ In addition, the Mechanics' Society had paid off much of its debt by 1899 and the necessity of maintaining a large membership was diminished. There is no evidence of major conflicts within the Society or dissatisfaction which would account for the decline. Rather, it seems that once the economic storm passed, the unions simply went their own separate ways.

A third attempt to form a labour central in St. John's was along the more orthodox lines of a city central. In the spring of 1905 the St. John's local of the International Association of Machinists [IAM] (formed at the shops of the Newfoundland Railway a year earlier), circularized local unions inviting them to join in the formation of a Trades and Labour Council.³⁴ At a meeting of the Coopers' Union on April 6, 1905 three representatives of the IAM listed the goals of the Council as follows:

³² The Evening Telegram, March 7, 1899.

³³ The Evening Telegram, March 7, 1899.

³⁴ Minute Books of the St. John's Coopers' Union 1903-1921 (manuscript in the possession of W.J.C. Chelwinski, Department of History, Memorial University of Newfoundland).

1. ... uplifting of Trades and Labour Unions generally to the position which they should be held in the community.
2. ... helping each other with grievances and strikes.
3. ... returning Labour representatives to the Legislature and Municipal Council.
4. ... forming a co-operative to sell all manner of necessities more cheaply.
5. ... to start a paper as there is no paper here that is not under the control of the capitalist.³⁵

The aims of the proposed council conformed very closely to the aims of the many city centrals in existence in Canada at the time. The first city central in Canada was the Toronto Trades Assembly organized in 1891.³⁶ By 1901 there were twenty-five similar organizations across the country and the IAM representatives pointed to the Canadian centrals as proof that one could succeed in St. John's.

The major concern of the city centrals centered on winning legislative reform through direct political action.³⁷ This reflected the British heritage of many Canadian trade unionists. In Britain permanent city centrals existed in almost every leading industrial city from the mid-1860s and in most cases their priority was direct political involvement.³⁸ That an American-based international

³⁵ Coopers' Minutes, April 12, 1905.

³⁶ Morden Lazarus, The Trade Union Movement in Canada (Toronto: Press Associates, 1972), p. 4.

³⁷ Logan, Trade Unions, p. 55.

³⁸ Sidney and Beatrice Webb, The History of Trade Unionism (London: Longman's, Green and Co., 1926), p. 244.

union promoted a similar approach in Newfoundland is interesting for the IAM was a member of the American Federation of Labour [AFL], an organization well known for its opposition to direct political action by Labour.³⁹ Although the early city centrals in the United States attempted to nominate and elect Labour candidates in municipal and state elections, once the AFL began to dominate the American Labour Movement the practice stopped. The AFL followed the maxim of its president Samuel Gompers in politics, "Reward your friends, defeat your enemies," which in practice meant lobbying existing political parties in the interests of Labour, rather than creating a new party through which Labour could gain control over the political process. The Canadian locals of American international unions were more 'political' than their American counterparts, which is perhaps an indication the IAM local at the Newfoundland Railway was connected with the Canadian rather than the American side of the Union. The city central the IAM tried to form in St. John's, however, did not succeed. On June 8, 1905 George Power the president of the Coopers' Union informed the Unions' monthly meeting that he and Union secretary William Linegar were present at the founding meeting of the Council.⁴⁰ In fact, Power was elected its vice-president but he cautioned the new organization would move slowly until the concept was fully understood. Not another mention is made of the Council in the Coopers' minute books or in newspapers. Apparently it failed, because in 1907 the Mayor of St. John's, labour.

³⁹ Ruth L. Herowitz, Political Ideologies of Organized Labor (New Brunswick, New Jersey: Transaction Books, 1978), p. 15.

⁴⁰ Coopers' Minutes, June 8, 1905.

lawyer M.P. Gibbs, made the fourth attempt in fourteen years to form a city-wide council of trade unions.⁴¹

Gibbs was a controversial figure, well liked by many trade unionists, despised as a political opportunist by others. He started his political career in 1895 as an unsuccessful Tory candidate, but the overwhelming popularity of his Liberal co-religionist, E.P. Morris, drew him into the Morris party. In the labour field he helped the longshoremen, the bakers and the carpenters to form unions, and he and Morris became the leading St. John's trade union lawyers.⁴² But his plan to form a St. John's Trades and Labour Council [SJ TLC] did not achieve the popular support of either the Workingmen's Union or the Affiliations Movement. At first five unions, the carpenters, masons, tinsmiths, bakers and tailors, joined the SJ TLC followed by the retail clerks and the longshoremen.⁴³ But over half the unions in St. John's, including the iron moulders, truckmen, shipwrights, coopers, and marine firemen, either rejected or ignored the idea. The goal of the SJ TLC "to promote the welfare of the workman and to adjust differences whenever they arise between employers and employed" was never implemented.⁴⁴

The most striking feature of labour centrals in St. John's during this period was their impermanence — evidence of substantial

⁴¹The Evening Telegram, August 22, 1907.

⁴²The Evening Herald, February 6, 1904.

⁴³Cohen, Royal Commission, p. 76.

⁴⁴The Evening Telegram, August 22, 1907.

difficulties to overcome before organized Labour could become a force within Newfoundland society. Apart from the instability of the economy, which undermined the unions' strength in collective bargaining, trade unionists were hampered by a lack of formal education. As children they attended denominationally-controlled schools which taught them to accept their place in society, at the bottom of the social pyramid.⁴⁵ The need to get jobs to support their families forced most to give up at an early age even this inadequate schooling. Since many trade unionists lacked the education necessary to negotiate written contracts or to effectively lobby government, they had to rely on sympathetic middle class progressives such as Gibbs and White. A further problem was the lack of a legislative framework for trade unions and inadequate legal protection for individual workers. At mid-century the prevailing attitude was that matters of wages and working conditions were not the proper business of the House of Assembly. The few pieces of legislation that were passed, such as the Master and Servants Act of 1858, favoured the employer.⁴⁶ While it provided some slight protection for fishermen and sealers, the Act made breach of contract by the employee a criminal offence liable to severe penalty. The employer was merely made responsible for the payment of wages to the employee three days after they fell due. Even legislation which appeared to favour the employee was of little actual benefit. The Employer's Liability Act of 1887 made the employer liable for injuries suffered by employees on the job, but

⁴⁵ Ian McDonald, "W.F. Coaker and the Fishermen's Protective Union in Newfoundland Politics 1909-1925" (unpublished Ph.D. thesis, University of London, 1971).

⁴⁶ Newfoundland Statutes, 1858, 21 Vict., Chap. 9, "The Master and Servant Act."

compensation could only be collected by suing the employer in the courts.

If the employee was shown to be partially responsible for the accident or if it was the fault of a fellow workman, the case could be lost.⁴⁷

After 1887 the situation began to change, perhaps reflecting the increased political power offered to the working class by the introduction of the Secret Ballot Act in 1887 and the extension of the franchise in 1890 to males over twenty-one years. In 1888 an act was passed which provided compensation to the families of Bank fishermen lost at sea from a fund financed on a compulsory basis by the schooner owners.⁴⁸ In 1890 the Mechanics' Lien Act allowed workmen employed on a building, structure or mine to place a lien on the property for unpaid wages.⁴⁹ In 1902 an amendment to the Employer's Liability Act⁵⁰ was passed preventing employers from forcing workmen to sign away their rights under the act as a condition of employment — a requirement of the standard contract with the Reid Newfoundland Railway. And in 1906 an extensive set of laws was passed regulating working conditions in the mining industry.⁵¹ Clearly the old political system, which

⁴⁷ Newfoundland Statutes, 1887, 50 Vict., Chap. 9, "The Employer Liability Act."

⁴⁸ Newfoundland Statutes, 1888, 51 Vict., Chap. 11, "An Act to Compensate Families of Fishermen Lost at the Bank Fishery."

⁴⁹ Newfoundland Statutes, 1890, 53 Vict., Chap. 18, "The Mechanics' Lien Act."

⁵⁰ Newfoundland Statutes, 1902, 2 Ed. VII, Chap. 22, "The Employer Liability Act Amendment."

⁵¹ Newfoundland Statutes, 1906, 6 Ed. VII, Chap. 15, "The Mining Act."

acknowledged working class problems only in a grudging disbursement of dole during periodic depressions, was slowly changing. The rise of a newly enfranchised working class forced politicians to deal with workers' grievances. For trade unions, proof that they had established their legitimacy came with the passage of the Trade Union Act of 1910.⁵² The bill, almost an exact copy of the Trade Union Act passed in Britain four decades earlier, was presented in the Legislature by M.P. Gibbs, now a member of the House. In His comments on the bill Prime Minister E.P. Morris summed up the Newfoundland trade union movement to 1910.

I think, Sir, we are all proud that matters should have been brought to their present high state of perfection in connection with organized labour in the amicable and friendly relations which exist between all parties, employers and employed, masters and servants. I think we all ought as citizens of this town, feel proud of the manner in which all disputes are dealt with, of good results which have accrued all around.⁵³

The positive picture painted by Morris was a convenient brand of political myopia. Since the turn of the century there had been several strikes, including two particularly bitter disputes. One on Bell Island brought in the police to arrest the strike leaders and the second involved a massive strike of sealers in 1902.⁵⁴ If labour relations were as quiescent as Morris implied, it was because economic and social conditions on the Island forced labour to adopt a conciliatory posture. For it was

⁵² Newfoundland Statutes, 1910, 17 Ed. VII, Chap. 6, "The Trade Union Act."

⁵³ Proceedings of the House of Assembly, 1910, p. 323.

⁵⁴ I.G. Morris, "Our Local Strikes," The Newfoundland Quarterly, Vol. II, No. 2 (September 1902), 20.

not a sign of satisfaction, and it was not an environment that was to survive the War.

In Newfoundland, as elsewhere, the relative prosperity that had been a feature of the early twentieth century was eroded by wartime inflation. The decline in workers' purchasing power, especially in relation to commodities such as food and clothing, had become so pronounced by 1917 that one union leader estimated the value of the dollar had been cut in half since 1914.⁵⁵ He was not far off the mark. With October 3, 1914 as the base of 100; the price index declined to eighty-seven in January 1916 when inflation overtook the economy. By January 6, 1917 the index stood at 125, and between January 6 and May 26, 1917 rose to 154.⁵⁶ In a letter to *The Evening Telegram*, Francis Woods, president of the Firemen's Union, noted that trade unions had pledged themselves to a no strike policy as part of their patriotic contribution to the war effort.⁵⁷ Now their members faced inflated wartime prices with pre-war wages. There was a considerable amount of suspicion that the sharp rise in food prices was the result of price-gouging by Water Street merchants. Even *The Evening Telegram* which seldom showed any eagerness to criticize its advertisers levelled charges of profiteering and called for excess profits legislation and a commission of inquiry. A High Cost of Living Commission was

⁵⁵ *The Evening Telegram*, April 18, 1917.

⁵⁶ McDonald, "Coaker and the F.P.U.," Table 4, p. 365.

⁵⁷ *The Evening Telegram*, January 27, 1917.

⁵⁸ *The Evening Telegram*, April 3, 1917.

appointed and its first report of June 1917 amply confirmed the worst suspicions.

The Commission found that a flour combine was operating in St. John's and that at least \$600,000 in excess profits had been made by the importers concerned - men who were all very prominent in the Patriotic Association and whose profits on flour alone could hardly be considered small in a country where the record high revenue of the government for 1916-1917 was only \$5,206,647. The Commission also disclosed some interesting information concerning freight rates, finding that while, for example, freight rates for the transportation of flour had increased only by about twenty-five percent in Canada from the beginning of the War, those of the Reid Railway system had been increased by approximately 650 percent and that a local shipping company had increased its rates by 500 percent. The Commission could find no sufficient reason for the increased rates of either company.⁵⁹

Even before the report of the Commission was made public, the trade unions in St. John's took action. In the spring of 1917 they launched a series of strikes and wage demands unparalleled in Newfoundland history.

In Newfoundland, Canada, the United States and, to a lesser degree, in Britain, the economic situation was the same.⁶⁰ Trade unions in the latter three countries, however, had a significant advantage over those in Newfoundland when it came to protecting their interests. In each there was a national central labour organization to lobby government to enact measures protecting working people from wartime inflation. In

⁵⁹ McDonald, "Coaker and the F.P.U.," p. 138.

⁶⁰ Jean Trepp McKelvey, AFL Attitudes toward Production 1902-1932 (Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 1952), p. 32; Pelling, British Trade Unionism, p. 32; Lipton, Trade Union Movement, p. 168.

the United States, the AFL even obtained guarantees allowing trade unions to organize and to continue collective bargaining during war-time in return for a pledge to maintain production.⁶¹ In an effort to create a similar strong voice for Newfoundland unions, a group of workers at the Reid Newfoundland Railway foundry and docks (fresh from a strike of their own) advanced a plan to bring all workers in Newfoundland into one organization.⁶²

This organization, the Newfoundland Industrial Workers' Association [NIWA], shared some of the characteristics of its predecessors in that it shunned revolutionary objectives, was dedicated to organizing new unions, and acted as a legislative lobby in the interests of the working class. The first step taken was to circularize all the unions in the St. John's area inviting them to form a central labour body. For the most part the response was enthusiastic, and a founding meeting was held on April 25, 1917.⁶³

In many ways the NIWA represented a new development in Newfoundland trade unionism. The leadership was provided by labourers and tradesmen such as W.J. (Billy) Wheeler and Philip Bennet, the NIWA's first president.⁶⁴ Wheeler was poorly educated in a formal sense, but

⁶¹ McKelvey, AFL Attitudes, p. 33.

⁶² George H. Tucker, "The Old N.I.W.A.," in The Book of Newfoundland, I, edited by J.R. Smallwood (St. John's: Newfoundland Book Publishers Limited, 1937), 279.

⁶³ The Evening Telegram, February 27, 1917.

⁶⁴ Joseph R. Smallwood, interview, June 1975. Mr. Smallwood was editor of the NIWA newspaper, The Industrial Worker.

one of the organization's finest orators. Middle class intellectuals, such as socialist MHA George Grimes and civil servant Warwick Smith, were also members; but their role (unlike that of Gibbs and White in previous organizations) was restricted to support rather than leadership. The structure of the NIWA was a unique blend of the characteristics of a city central, a national labour federation, and the Knights of Labour.⁶⁵ At the Railway the NIWA organized on an industrial basis, cutting across craft lines, and it extended the same type of organization to other workshops and factories in St. John's. It also managed to enroll many of the craft unions in St. John's, while outside the city it chartered branches made up of individual members rather than affiliated unions. Even in St. John's, however, the NIWA accepted individual members from firms which were not large enough to form locals. Its unique branch structure made it the first central labour organization to have a strong presence outside of St. John's, with lodges at Grand Falls and Botwood⁶⁶ and possibly at railway centres across the Island.⁶⁷ The NIWA was more ambitious, militant, and more successful than any of its predecessors. In 1918 it organized a successful strike

⁶⁵ Constitution and Bye-laws of the Newfoundland Industrial Workers' Association (Hattenhauer Collection, Henrietta Harvey Library, Memorial University of Newfoundland, file no. 36).

⁶⁶ Minute Book of the Grand Falls Lodge of the Newfoundland Industrial Workers' Association, February 9, 1918 - March 14, 1919 (manuscript, located in the offices of the Grand Falls Co-operative Society, Grand Falls, Newfoundland).

⁶⁷ Fredrick Lush, interview, February 1975. Mr. Lush joined the NIWA after it had begun to decline. He later became one of the founders of Lodge 1237 of the International Association of Machinists and Secretary of the Newfoundland Federation of Labour from 1939 to 1946.

in 1919. Desire for legislative reform was not satisfied by such a small victory and it was decided that direct political action was necessary.⁷¹

The decision to run three candidates in the general election of 1919 split a previously unified and vigorous organization. Michael James, the editor of *The Industrial Worker*, was bitterly opposed to the idea of mixing politics and trade unionism, as was Lodge Number Three in Grand Falls.⁷² On the other hand, William Linegar, who was then president of the Coopers' Union, and a majority of the St. John's Lodge, were in favour.⁷³ Originally the NIWA intended to contest all six St. John's seats, but difficulties in finding suitable candidates resulted in only three candidates in the predominantly working class district of St. John's West.⁷⁴ The platform of the Workingman's Party, as the NIWA's political arm was called, contained very few specific proposals and was largely an appeal to working class voters to elect working class representatives.⁷⁵ The electorate did not respond and the NIWA candidates finished seventh, eighth and ninth in a field of ten. More serious was the fact that the decision to enter politics

⁷¹Report of the Proceedings of the Twelfth Annual Convention of the Newfoundland Federation of Labour (n.p., n.d.), p. 32.

⁷²Grand Falls N.I.W.A. Minute Book, 1918.

⁷³Tucker, "The Old N.I.W.A.," p. 281.

⁷⁴The Evening Telegram, September 20, 1919.

⁷⁵"Divided We Fall," a single sheet election broadside of the Workingmen's Party; 1919 (Hattenhauer Collection, file no. 71).

for recognition at the Reid Shops in St. John's, and later it even made an attempt to found a political party.⁶⁸ In the main, however, it concentrated on worker education, agitation for legislative reform and the establishment of consumer co-operatives.

Through weekly meetings which were a forum for debating trade union issues and by the publication of a semi-weekly newspaper, *The Industrial Worker*,⁶⁹ the leaders of the NIWA sought to educate members to the principles of trade unionism and self-help. They encouraged workers to view themselves as a class and organized Labour Day parades and holiday excursions to bring workers together socially as well as economically.⁷⁰ They put into practice the self-help principles of the constitution by starting co-operative stores in response to the inflation and profiteering which was partially responsible for the organization's formation. In 1918 stores were opened in St. John's and Grand Falls. The St. John's store was poorly managed and lasted only three years, but the Grand Falls store is still operating. In the legislative field the NIWA met with less success. The request for establishment of a Department of Labour was rejected although NIWA agitation led to another High Cost of Living Commission

⁶⁸ Cohen, Royal Commission, p. 77.

⁶⁹ I.D.H. McDonald, Chronological List of Newfoundland Newspapers in the Public Collections at the Gosling Memorial Library and Public Archives (St. John's: Mimeographed, 1969), p. 18. There are extensive summaries of the contents of some of the newspapers contained in the above list. The information used here was taken from the list rather than directly from the source because the provincial archives had 'misplaced' the original documents since the list was compiled.

⁷⁰ Grand Falls N.I.W.A. Minute Book, 1918.

shattered the harmony of the organization and was a major factor in its decline.⁷⁶

Even before this there were indications that the NIWA was in difficulty. In a letter to *The Evening Telegram* Francis Woods accused the leaders of the NIWA of being incompetent, petty-minded and overpaid. According to Woods, it was for these reasons that his union, the firemen, had left the NIWA earlier in the year. In addition, the operation of the co-operative store was occupying the time of some of the most competent members of the organization, and the inflation which had acted as a major impetus for the formation of the NIWA had abated. Thus the NIWA declined rapidly and although it continued to exist well into the late 1930s, it never regained its former prominence. The NIWA nonetheless did represent a major step forward in the Labour Movement. It was the first Newfoundland labour organization to extend its sphere of activity outside St. John's, it was active for a longer period of time than any previous labour central and it showed greater energy in its self-help and educational programs. It was also important in that it had working class leadership and provided a training ground for many of the trade unionists who would be the founders of the NFL.

Another trait shared by the founders of the NFL was their association with the international unions of the AFL. The international unions appeared in Newfoundland much later than in Canada due to Newfoundland's greater distance from the United States and its relatively small labour force. As late as 1909 the only international union to have a local in Newfoundland was the IAM. By 1921, however,

⁷⁶ Twelfth Proceedings, p. 32.

international union locals represented approximately one-third of the unionized workforce and were numerous enough in St. John's to make another attempt at forming a city central.⁷⁷ The number of international unions in Newfoundland began to increase in 1910 after a visit from the organizer of the Journeymen Tailors' Union of America [JTUA], Hugh Robinson of Hamilton, Ontario.⁷⁸ Robinson organized the clothing manufacturing shop at one of St. John's largest department stores and when he returned to the mainland he informed other international organizers that several unions existed in St. John's and that some might be interested in affiliation.⁷⁹ Several international organizers took Robinson's advice and by 1912 the St. John's Printers' Union, the St. John's Boot and Shoe Workers', and the St. John's Bricklayers and Masons were affiliated with international unions.⁸⁰ Simultaneously, skilled American and Canadian paper makers who were brought in to man the new paper mill in Grand Falls, formed a local of the International Brotherhood of Paper Makers [IBPM].⁸¹ Labourers and tradesmen at the mill

⁷⁷ The Federator, Vol. 3, No. 2 (1957); The Minute Book of the International Typographical Union Local 703, 1912-1920 (St. John's; manuscript); Register of Trade Unions, Newfoundland (St. John's; manuscript). Manuscripts located in the Main Library, Memorial University of Newfoundland.

⁷⁸ The Eastern Labor News, October 1, 1910.

⁷⁹ The Eastern Labor News, October 1, 1910.

⁸⁰ The Eastern Labor News, October 26, 1912.

⁸¹ Arthur Rowe, interview, March 1975. Mr. Rowe was a long time member of Local 88, IBPM and a delegate to the founding convention of the NFL in 1937; George Rendall to Donna Butt, interview, January 1975. Mr. Rendall was at one time president of the IBPS and PMW local in Grand Falls and moved to Corner Brook when construction started at the new mill.

formed a local of the International Brotherhood of Pulp, Sulphite and Paper Mill Workers [IBPS and PMW]. At the railway there was the International Brotherhood of Railway Trainmen [IBRT], the Brotherhood of Firemen and Engineers [BF&E], and the Order of Railway Telegraphers [ORT].⁸² In 1920 the carpenters' union in St. John's joined the United Brotherhood of Carpenters and Joiners of America [UBCJ] and at about the same time pressmen in several St. John's printing shops formed a local of the International Pressmen's Association. Several of the international unions in St. John's formed the Central Labour Council, which was chartered by the AFL on May 1, 1921 but which did not survive for long.⁸² Soon afterwards two of its most important members, the Pressmen and the Printers, became embroiled in a strike which effectively destroyed both unions and the Council was not heard from again. The Council was, however, indicative of the growing importance of the internationals and four years later they were part of the last *unsuccessful* attempt to form a national central labour organization.

In February of 1925 a new organizer for the IBPS and PMW arrived in Grand Falls.⁸³ He was Joseph Smallwood, fresh from a job on the New York socialist paper *The Call* and his tour as a public speaker for the Progressive Party during the 1924 presidential elections.⁸⁴ Although he originally intended to travel the world he was persuaded

⁸² The Daily Unionist, May 3, 1921.

⁸³ Richard Gwyn, Smallwood: the Unlikely Revolutionary (Toronto and Montreal: McClelland and Stewart Limited, 1968), p. 37.

⁸⁴ Gwyn, Smallwood, p. 37.

to return home to Newfoundland by the secretary-treasurer of the IBPS and PMW, his friend John P. Burke.⁸⁵ The Grand Falls Local was in need of an organizer. A disastrous three-month strike had virtually destroyed the Local leaving only enough members (seven) to hold their international charter. In fact, the union was dead, for it held no meetings and did not negotiate with management.⁸⁶ Within two months of his arrival Smallwood brought the membership back up to 700.⁸⁷ Not content with this success he convened a meeting of six unions at Grand Falls early in the summer of 1925 and formed a body called the Newfoundland Federation of Labour.⁸⁸

The NFL's two primary aims were to encourage communications between unions and to lobby for legislation favourable to the working class. The major policy discussion of the first meeting centered around the need to replace the existing Workmens' Compensation Act by one based on the Ontario and North Dakota models.⁸⁹ Smallwood was elected president of the Federation and in June he left Grand Falls to organize workers at the new paper mill on the Humber River.⁹⁰ Unknown to

⁸⁵ Joseph Smallwood, interview, June 1975.

⁸⁶ Arthur Rowe, interview, March 1975.

⁸⁷ Gwyn, Smallwood, p. 37.

⁸⁸ Cohen, Royal Commission, p. 122.

⁸⁹ The Fishermen's Advocate, January 15, 1926.

⁹⁰ Gwyn, Smallwood, p. 37.

union organizer. The founders of the later NFL did more than two years of careful preparation before holding a founding convention, while only a few months of planning was put into its 1925 counterpart. In short, the 1925 experience grew out of the enthusiasm of one man, and it was not until ten years later that the right combination of personnel, economic development, and social conditions were conducive to the successful establishment of a sound federation of trade unions.

G.D.H. Cole has argued that while the details are different, the essentials have been the same for the development of trade unionism in Western industrialized economies.⁹⁴ An examination of the sequence of events in Newfoundland and the countries with which Newfoundland had its closest cultural and political links confirms the thesis. According to Cole, the condition of the Trade Union Movement differs with the degree of industrialization of each country and the relative importance of the non-agricultural labour force. In Canada, Britain, the United States and Newfoundland the fore-runners of the trade unions were the mutual benefit societies such as the Mechanics' Society. The benefit societies included masters and workmen, but as some masters began to accumulate large amounts of capital and expand the size of their shops, the employer-employee dichotomy began to grow. As mutual aid gave way to self-interest workers created the trade union to protect their interests. For a time most trade unions operated as autonomous units but when large scale industrialization occurred industry-wide unions

⁹⁴ Cole, A Short History, p. 6.

Smallwood, workers at the Corner Brook mill had already begun to form a local of the LBPS and PMW.⁹¹ Feeling that his presence was not required, he launched a new crusade. In August he started a 600 mile walk over the length of the railway to organize sectionmen to resist a reduction in wages from twenty-five cents to twenty-two and a half cents an hour.⁹² He was ultimately successful in forcing the Railway to recind the wage cut, but the Federation he founded failed a few months after he left Grand Falls.

According to Richard Gwyn, the NFL collapsed for lack of sustained leadership. A fuller explanation is to be found in the state of the economy and the quality of planning and execution put into the Federation. By 1925 the economy was again on the upswing and the sense of urgency born of hard times that had been the catalyst for previous central labour organizations was no longer present. Moreover the prevailing ideology of the North American social climate was centered upon an idealization of 'free enterprise' and competitive individualism.⁹³ While such a philosophy was more prevalent in the United States than in Newfoundland, the inevitable interest of the daily press in things American caused a leakage of these attitudes to the Island. Finally, Smallwood was a twenty-five year old idealist whose heart was in the right place but whose previous experience was as a journalist, not a

⁹¹ George Rendall to Donna Butt, interview, January 1975.

⁹² Gwyn, Smallwood, p. 37.

⁹³ Stuart Jamieson, Times of Trouble: Labour Unrest and Industrial Conflict in Canada 1900-1966 (Ottawa: Institute of Industrial Relations, The University of British Columbia, 1968), p. 194.

developed, and then national central labour organizations. It was at that point the isolated trade unions coalesced into a 'Labour Movement'. As control over capital and labour became centralized in the hands of fewer and fewer capitalists, trade unions were forced to centralize certain aspects of their operations in order to respond adequately to changing conditions. The early attempts to establish labour centrals demonstrate this evolutionary process as it occurred in Newfoundland. It also gives us an insight into the unique features of the environment from which the Newfoundland Federation of Labour emerged.

The lack of industrialization, the limited amount of direct contact with foreign labour movements and the absence of European immigration⁹⁵ account for the slowness of the transition by Newfoundland unions from autonomous units to a mutually supportive 'Labour Movement'. Gradually, however, the transition was made. The country's economic base broadened. The construction of the railway was the first major step in lessening the almost total dependence on the fishery. By 1930 the opening of the Bell Island mines and paper mills in Grand Falls and Corner Brook added to the trend. These large industries in turn brought Newfoundland into contact with international unions. The internationals accepted labour centrals as an integral part of the Labour Movement, and as the internationals became a more significant factor in the Newfoundland Labour Movement the possibility a permanent labour central would be founded in Newfoundland increased.

⁹⁵H.R. McCormack, Reformers, Rebels and Revolutionaries: The Western Canadian Radical Movement 1899-1919 (Toronto and Buffalo: University of Toronto Press, 1977), p. 16.

CHAPTER THREE

FOUNDING THE FEDERATION

The founding of Newfoundland's first enduring labour central, the NEL, occurred in 1937, long after the formation of continuing national trade union federations in countries with which Newfoundland was closely linked. The Trade Union Congress of Great Britain was established in 1869, the fore-runner of the Canadian Labour Congress [CLC] in 1883, and the American Federation of Labour in 1886. Although the impulse to form trade unions was present from the late nineteenth century, for the most part rank and file trade union members did not perceive their community of interest to extend beyond their own occupational groups. While there were several attempts to establish an umbrella organization to represent the working class, the economic and social matrix of Newfoundland was too weak to sustain them. Only when large scale industrialization began to take place and, as a consequence, the paternalistic bond between employers and workers began to weaken, did a viable Labour Movement emerge.

Industrialization began with the railway in the 1880s, the Wabana iron mines in the 1890s, and the Grand Falls pulp and paper mill in the first decade of the twentieth century. After the War a new paper mill opened in Corner Brook in 1925, together with a hydro-electric plant at Deer Lake. New mines opened at Buchans in 1928 and St. Lawrence in 1933. In 1934 both paper companies made changes in their operations

which created a new professional class of loggers.¹ Previously the companies had relied on fishermen who logged in the winter. In 1934 the companies decided it was more economical to cut wood in the summer when it was most accessible, haul it to the frozen rivers in winter when it could be moved most easily, and drive it in the spring when the ice melted. The change in operations largely excluded fishermen from the logging industry resulting in fuller employment for a smaller group of professional loggers. Along with the manufacturing plants in St. John's these new industries created the base needed for a viable Trade Union Movement. The catalyst was the Great Depression.

On February 16, 1934 in the ballroom of the Newfoundland Hotel, Newfoundland's last prime minister, Frederick C. Alderdice, signed the document that suspended the country's dominion status.² Although the period from 1920 to 1927 had been one of general economic stagnation, improvement in the markets for fishery products and increased exports of paper and minerals resulted in modest advances in prosperity in 1928 and 1929. However, when fish prices dropped in 1930 to their lowest level since 1913 the Newfoundland economy was in trouble.³ Burdened by an uneconomic railroad, an enormous war debt and shrinking revenues, the government was forced to borrow heavily abroad to meet current account expenditures. As the depression in the fish markets

¹T.K. Liddell, Industrial Survey of Newfoundland (St. John's: Robinson and Company Limited, Printers, 1940), p. 15.

²Noel, Politics, p. 5.

³Smallwood, The Book of Newfoundland, I, p. 325, cited in Noel, Politics, p. 189.

intensified so did the borrowing and an increasingly high proportion of annual revenues were needed to meet interest charges and redeem bond issues. In 1928 \$10,000,000 was raised to retire a war loan of \$7,500,000, the remainder being used to cover the current account deficit and for certain items of capital expenditure. In 1929, just under \$6,000,000 was raised and in 1930 another \$5,000,000 was secured on favourable terms. At the same time burgeoning unemployment resulted in growing pressure on the government to provide able-bodied relief. In the fiscal year 1930-31 the deficit was estimated at a further \$8,000,000 and again a loan to cover the shortfall was tendered. This time the tender call drew no response. The accumulated national debt was nearly \$100,000,000 and the interest payments alone required sixty-five percent of the government's annual revenues.⁴

In the eyes of most of the population the fault lay with the politicians. In secret testimony before the Amulree Commission, G.B. Carter, the president of the IBPM local in Grand Falls, summed up the frustration, confusion and disgust he felt towards the political system.

A fellow will come around, he is looking for election, he will promise everything, lead people astray, he will go in and do no better than the other fellow. This is what has been going on for the last 25 years, nobody seems to do anything - only take their pay cheques and pass a few Bills. In nine cases out of ten it does not amount to anything. There is something wrong. There may not be anything wrong with the form of the government, but there is something wrong with the way it is carried out.⁵

⁴Noel, Politics, p. 189.

⁵The Magrath Papers, Newfoundland Royal Commission. Saturday, 22nd April, 1933 (manuscript, located in the Public Archives of Canada, Ottawa, Ontario), pp. 6-7.

The spectacles of extravagant public works expenditures made at election time, a kickback scandal involving Prime Minister Richard Squires in 1923, and the belief the economy had been badly mismanaged alienated working people from the political leaders. Of the seven trade unionists to testify before the Commission, all expressed disgust with the political system and two, in independent interviews, suggested the government be handed over to an appointed commission.⁶

This was a drastic solution but the situation faced by workers was equally drastic. The International Paper Company at Corner Brook in 1931 cut the price of a cord of wood from \$2.50 to between \$1.50 and \$1.20. In 1932 they announced a further reduction to between \$1.30 and \$1.00, at a time when each man paid sixty-six cents a day board and the average cut was 1.3 cords a day.⁷ In 1933 the wage cuts were extended to the mill in Corner Brook. Hourly rates were reduced thirty percent and the work week reduced to four days, effectively cutting wages in half.⁸ At the Bell Island mines the work force was lowered from 2,200 to 1,100 in 1933 while the payroll fell from \$2,000,000 to \$500,000 a year.⁹ The railway hired Robert J. Magor, a Canadian efficiency expert to design and implement retrenchment. He

⁶The Magrath Papers, Saturday, April 22, 1933, p. 9; Thursday, June 8, 1933, p. 9; Monday, June 18, 1933, p. 11.

⁷Newfoundland Royal Commission 1933 Report (London: H.M.S.O. cmd., 1933), p. 151. Referred to as Amulree Report.

⁸Amulree Report, p. 150.

⁹Amulree Report, p. 8.

closed down several branch lines, curtailed the coastal steamer service, reduced staff from 2,400 to 1,800 and cut wages by between ten and twenty-five percent.¹⁰ Teachers' salaries were reduced by twenty-five percent in 1931 and by another fifty percent in 1932;¹¹ carpenters in St. John's took a thirty percent cut in 1933;¹² civil servants a twenty-five and 27.5 percent cut in the same year; and employment in the St. John's manufacturing industries fell from 1,833 in 1921 to 1,000 in 1933.¹³ The problems of underemployment and unemployment were compounded, moreover, by returning immigrants.

Many Newfoundlanders who had previously gone to the United States and Canada to find employment for all or part of the year now found that their mainland jobs had disappeared. By 1933 10,000 workers had returned to Newfoundland depriving the country of \$1,000,000 a year previously sent home to relatives and putting an additional strain on the relief budget.¹⁴ Emigration, which had always acted as a relief valve for labour surpluses, was reduced to a trickle and there were now surpluses of skilled as well as unskilled labour. As a consequence the bargaining position of virtually every Newfoundland worker was

¹⁰ Irving Fogwill, "The Story of the Brotherhood in Newfoundland," The Railway Clerk (May 1938), 214; Amulree Report, p. 68.

¹¹ Amulree Report, p. 65.

¹² The Federator, Vol. 3, No. 2 (1933), 12.

¹³ Amulree Report, p. 9.

¹⁴ Amulree Report, p. 76.

in order to collect strike pay from their international head offices) as a result of a strike for the forty-four hour week. By the end of 1933 only 7,010 Newfoundland workers were members of trade unions.²¹ Of these 2,000 were members of the five paper mill unions and another 2,400 belonged to the Longshoremen's Protective Union of St. John's. Most of the remainder were enrolled in various nearly dormant craft unions in St. John's and in four locals of the three international unions at the railway. The Railway Brotherhoods, and probably the International Boot and Shoe Workers' Union in St. John's, were the only organizations with signed agreements. Even at the paper mills management refused to grant formal recognition to the IBPM or the IBPS and PMW, refusing to accept letters from the unions written on union stationery.²² The companies did grant the unions informal recognition, however, by allowing them to represent their members in grievances and even in matters of wages and working conditions. Among Western nations only the Labour Movement in Britain survived relatively unscathed, an occurrence Henry Pelling argues was a result of the key role played by the Trade Union Movement in electing a Labour government in 1929.

Although the Depression destroyed some Newfoundland unions it contained the seeds of the rebirth of trade unions in Newfoundland. The wage reductions of the early 1930s were a rude awakening

²¹ See Appendix, Table 1.

²² Report of the Proceedings of the Seventh Annual Convention of the Newfoundland Federation of Labour (St. John's: Long Brothers, 1943), p. 43.

destroyed and trade unions were compelled to adopt a defensive posture merely to minimize their losses.¹⁵

The weakening of the trade unions was not a phenomena confined to Newfoundland, however; it was common to all of North America.¹⁶ After reaching a peak shortly after the War union membership in the United States and Canada declined. Even before the Depression, stable and falling prices, stiff employer opposition and a social climate idealizing free enterprise and competitive individualism generated complacency among workers who might otherwise have been amenable to organization.¹⁷ By 1933 U.S. membership had fallen to less than 3,000,000, the lowest level since 1917.¹⁸ In Canada it dropped from 373,800 in 1920 to 285,700 in 1933.¹⁹ There is no comparable statistical data for Newfoundland but the pattern appears to have been the same. In 1921 the IBEW Local 1097 at Grand Falls disintegrated during an unsuccessful strike at the paper mill.²⁰ Local 702 of the International Typographical Union and a local of the International Pressmen's Union were reduced to mere skeleton organizations (kept alive

¹⁵ Fredrick Lush, interview, February 1975.

¹⁶ Jamieson, Trouble, p. 192.

¹⁷ Jamieson, Trouble, p. 194.

¹⁸ U.S. Bureau of the Census, Historical Statistics of the United States (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1960), p. 98.

¹⁹ M.C. Urquhart and K.A.H. Buckley (eds.), Historical Statistics of Canada (Toronto: The MacMillan Company of Canada Ltd., 1965), p. 105.

²⁰ Arthur Rowe, interview, March 1975; George Hicks, "Newfoundland: From Shadow to Sunlight" (Mimeographed: Grand Falls City Library, n.d.), p. 318.

to many workers used to the paternalism which had characterized employer-employee relations. Although the nature of the relationship has most often been discussed in the context of merchants and fishermen, it was common in the industrial and service sectors as well.²³ It was not uncommon, even among the Water Street merchants in St. John's, to keep an old employee on after he or she had ceased to be an effective worker — a kind of working pension plan.²⁴ Tradesmen such as tinsmiths were often paid half in cash and half in vouchers redeemable on their employer's accounts at specified retail stores. Like fishermen, the tinsmiths often ended up in debt to their employers at the end of the year.²⁵ As the Depression intensified employers were less and less generous with the benefits and privileges they provided to employees. Together with the wage reductions this weakened the loyalty many employees felt towards their employers. Thus, the desperate economic situation combined with an increasing alienation between employees and their employers created a situation where workers began to turn to trade unions for protection. What followed was a modest recovery in the number of trade unions, and out of that, the founding of the NFL.

A union which illustrates the point is the International Brotherhood of Railway Clerks, Freight Handlers and Station Employees [BRC]. When the Railway cut wages and laid off several hundred

²³ I.C. Morris, "Our Local Strikes," The Newfoundland Quarterly, Vol. 11, No. 2 (September 1902), 21.

²⁴ Liddell, Survey, p. 53.

²⁵ The Labour Herald, August 26, 1938.

employees in 1933, the workers understood it to be a temporary measure. But when the year ended and neither wages nor jobs were restored, discontent began to grow.²⁶ The first man to act on that discontent was a clerk named Walter Sparks. Sparks was a thirty-five year old bachelor, a respected elder of Gower Street United Church and unlike many previous leaders, was well-educated. He was a graduate of Bishop's College (a secondary school) where he was an outstanding debater and active in many school clubs.²⁷ Later he attended night school at Memorial College and earned credits in English and Economics. His father, a travelling salesman, could not afford to send him away to university, however, so at age seventeen Walter Sparks got a job on the Railway.

Sparks was exposed to trade unions through the NIWA and later the three international unions at the Railway. He was never a member of any of these unions, because they did not cover clerical employees, but he saw how they benefited their members. This was particularly true during the 1933 lay-offs. Although the NIWA had ceased to be effective the internationals managed to maintain order and seniority in their lay-offs while other employees had to accept whatever fate management imposed upon them. In order to win the same protection for himself and his fellow clerks, Sparks contacted Frank Hall, Canadian Grand Vice-President of the BRC.²⁸ For a few months

²⁶ Fogwill, "The Brotherhood in Newfoundland," 68.

²⁷ Walter Sparks, interview, June 1975. Mr. Sparks was president of the Railway Clerks Union and the leading trade unionist in St. John's during the 1930s and 1940s.

²⁸ Fogwill, "The Brotherhood in Newfoundland," 215.

Sparks corresponded regularly with Hall, posing questions about the Brotherhood and gradually compiling a file of information on the international organization. Once confident he could answer questions about the union, he quietly circulated the file to other clerks in his office. Those who were interested in joining the organization were asked to sign a pledge. Many did, and in October of 1834 the clerks held their first meeting. Sparks was elected president and an application was made to the BRC for a charter. The application was accepted by the international and on January 23, 1935 Hall came to St. John's to present the clerks with their official charter.²⁹ Checkers and freight handlers were brought into the lodge later in the winter and over eighty percent of all eligible employees were enrolled. The Railway management was then informed of the existence of the union and the executive requested a meeting to begin preliminary negotiations of a collective agreement. To their amazement management refused to recognize the union because it contained clerks. Ostensibly, this decision was based on the fact some of the clerks were privy to privileged information, which made it inappropriate for them to belong to a union; but in the opinion of the clerks it was based on the fact they were 'white collar' rather than 'blue collar' workers.³⁰ According to management, unions were for labourers.

The refusal to negotiate had implications which went beyond the question of one small group of workers. The government had

²⁹ Fogwill, "The Brotherhood in Newfoundland," 215.

³⁰ Letter from Walter Sparks to BRC Vice-President F.H. Hall, Montreal, Quebec, March 22, 1936. Copy in possession of author.

purchased the railway from the Reid Newfoundland Company in 1923 and therefore the dispute was a direct test of the newly appointed Commission of Government's attitude towards trade unions. If the Commission was seen to be opposed to union organizing, then private employers could be expected to resist as well. But if a group of the government's own employees were allowed to form a trade union, then future organizing would be enhanced in the public and private sectors. The recognition battle was also important because it would establish a precedent for 'white collar' workers who up to now were thought to fall beyond the scope of trade union organization. Office workers and civil servants would be potential trade unionists.

When the initial request to negotiate was turned down, Sparks and his executive appealed to the commissioner responsible for the Railway, Wilfred Woods. He refused to hear the appeal.³¹ A request was then made to the government for a meeting with all six commissioners. They also refused to meet, referring the matter back to Woods. Even a letter from Frank Hall failed to impress the commissioners. The clerks now found themselves blocked and dangerously exposed to reprisals. They decided, therefore, to place their grievance before the British House of Commons.

Through Hall, the clerks wrote to George Lathan, a Labour MP and the General Secretary of the Association of Railway Clerks of Great Britain.³² Soon afterwards the International Grand President

³¹Letter from Governor Malcolm McDonald to George Lathan, May 5, 1936. Copy in possession of author.

³²Letter from Walter Sparks to Frank Hall, March 22, 1936; Robert Fogwill interview, March 1975. Mr. Fogwill was secretary of the

others were organizing the Railway in St. John's another group of internationally affiliated trade unionists were active in Grand Falls.

The group was led by Alphonsus Gregory Duggan, a trade unionist of thirty-five years experience.³⁶ At fifteen he left Newfoundland for the coal mines of Glace Bay where he joined his first union. Work in the coal mines was not to Duggan's liking, and in an effort to improve himself he enrolled in a Roman Catholic night school. It was there he became acquainted with Pope Leo XIII's encyclical on the labouring classes, a liberal statement of working class rights entitled *Rerum Novarum*. For Duggan, an extremely devout Roman Catholic, the encyclical offered a mission in life. In 1909 he returned to Newfoundland to work in the new paper mill in Grand Falls, and in 1913 helped organize Local 63 of the IBPS and PMW. Later he became the union's president and when Lodge Number Three of the NIWA was formed in Grand Falls in 1918 he was elected the corresponding secretary.³⁷

Duggan was unaware of the events unfolding at the Newfoundland Railway in 1934 and 1935 but sensed the moment was right to form a national organization of trade unions. In March 1934 he proposed the idea to his friend Ken Brown, the president of the largely defunct FPU. He also contacted the president of the Canadian Trades and Labour Congress and senior officials of the Trade Union Congress in Great Britain for information on the role and structure of

³⁶ Grand Falls N.I.W.A. Minute Book, 1918.

³⁷ Letter, A.G. Duggan to Cyril Strong, Grand Falls, July 9, 1950. Copy in possession of author.

of the BRC, George Harrison, dropped in on Lathan while on his way to a meeting of the International Labour Organization [ILO] in Geneva. Although this complex manouvering took time, in the spring of 1936 — fifteen months after management first refused to negotiate — the BRC's appeal was upheld in the House of Commons.³³ By early summer a revised set of proposals were put before management and on September 7, 1936 a collective agreement was signed. The success of the BRC encouraged other groups of railway employees to organize. The dockyard and repair shop workers joined the International Association of Machinists and the International Brotherhood of Carmen [IBC] and they and the BRC soon formed branches across Newfoundland. In addition, events in the United States re-enforced the new round of organizing. In Newfoundland American news was featured prominently in the local press. When the National Recovery Act was passed in the United States, stimulating a revival of trade unionism in that country, the effects were felt in Canada and Newfoundland.³⁴ Stuart Jamieson calls it the "demonstration effect" and combined with correspondence with international headquarters and visits from international representatives, it stimulated organizational efforts in several parts of the country.³⁵ Thus while Sparks and

BRC at this time and went on to become chairman of the Railway System Board in the early 1950s. Copy in possession of author.

³³Letter, Hall to Sparks, May 27, 1936.

³⁴Jamieson, Trouble, p. 216.

³⁵A.G. Duggan, "Sixty Years of Social Life, 'My Memoirs'" (Grand Falls: Mimeographed, February 23, 1967), pp. 1-10. The biographical information quoted in the following passages is taken from this account; however, it has been corroborated in several of the personal interviews listed in the bibliography.

central labour organizations.³⁸ In 1935 he took a more concrete step. At a meeting of Local 63 a motion was made to send a delegation to St. John's to make a representation to the Commission of Government on behalf of the union.³⁹ Duggan maintained that it would be a waste of time and money since it was unlikely the government would listen to one trade union on its own. However, if Newfoundland trade unions were to form a federation like the Trades and Labour Congress of Canada they could speak for the entire working class. Duggan's suggestion received qualified support and he was appointed to chair a committee to investigate the idea. Together with James Bragg, George Allan and Tim Sanger he set out to contact other Newfoundland unions.

At first the response was not encouraging, but then two representatives of the IAM contacted the committee on their way through Grand Falls.⁴⁰ Ron Fahey and F.A.F. Lush were executive members of the newly-formed local at the Railway in St. John's and were visiting members of their union in Grand Falls. When they returned home they took with them Duggan's proposal for a labour federation. All but one of the railway brotherhoods in St. John's approved and serious planning began.

³⁸ A.G. Duggan, an untitled, type-written, two page summary of the founding of the Newfoundland Federation of Labour dated October 3, 1958. Found among his personal belongings by his daughter Mrs. Mary McDonald and transmitted to the author by Mr. S. Thomas.

³⁹ Duggan, "Summary," p. 2.

⁴⁰ Fredrick Lush, interview, 1975.

The original idea of the Grand Falls committee was to invite Ken Brown to become president of the Federation. Although Brown would have to be elected, the committee felt his stature would lend respectability to the new organization. But while Brown was a former president of Local 63 and was now president of the FPU, St. John's unionists regarded him with suspicion.⁴¹ Between his terms as union president Brown had developed business interests in the Bonavista area and had been elected a Liberal member of the House of Assembly. The St. John's unions thought the Labour Movement was now strong enough to stand on its own and insisted the election of a president take place from amongst the unionists actively involved in the venture. Since the support of the St. John's unions was essential and the FPU was not involved, Duggan reluctantly dropped the idea. In October 1936 he called a meeting to form a steering committee for the formation.

All the representatives at the meeting were native Newfoundlanders; but in many ways the meeting was not representative of the country's trade unions. Of the twenty-seven unions in existence in Newfoundland only seven went to the meeting.⁴² Six of those were international locals, including the Grand Falls Paper Makers, the Grand Falls IBPS and PMW, the Corner Brook IPBS and PMW, the Order of Railroad Telegraphers, the Brotherhood of Railway Trainmen and the newly-organized Maintenance of Way employees. Even though Duggan intended the federation to include all unions the only independent

⁴¹ Fredrick Lush, interview, 1975.

⁴² The Grand Falls Advertiser, October 23, 1936.

union to attend was the Buchans Workmen's Protective Union. Moreover, with the exception of the Corner Brook delegation all the representatives were from central Newfoundland. The St. John's unions did not attend — some for lack of funds, others for lack of interest. Included among those who were there, however, were some of the most experienced trade unionists in the country. Banks Scott of the Grand Falls Pulp and Sulphite workers and Charles Raines of the Corner Brook IBPS and PMW had both been prominent members of the NIWA in Grand Falls in 1918 and 1919.⁴³ Charles Ballam, the man who later became Minister of Labour in J.R. Smallwood's first post-confederation government, played a role in organizing two unions at the Corner Brook mill and had also been a member of the IBEW local which was crushed in the 1921 strike at Grand Falls. Despite their relative prominence in trade union circles, however, they were not influential figures in the political and social life of the country. The meeting attracted little public attention and was held in very humble surroundings — a corner of the waiting room at the railway station.⁴⁴ The delegates had all been canvassed for their opinions in advance, and hence their attendance at the meeting was an endorsement of the concept of a federation of trade unions. They formalized their agreement in a resolution that stated:

Whereas it is expedient that an organization shall be effected for the purpose of promoting legislation in the interests of organized labour in the

⁴³ Grand Falls N.I.W.A. Minute Book, 1918.

⁴⁴ Report of the Proceedings of the Ninth Annual Convention of the Newfoundland Federation of Labour (Grand Falls: Robinson and Co., Ltd., 1945), p. 45.

Dominion of Newfoundland, BE IT RESOLVED that we, the members of Organized Labour form ourselves into a body to be known as the Newfoundland Trades and Labour Council [NTLC] for the purpose above specified.⁴⁵

A provisional executive was elected with Duggan as president and Raines as secretary and then the delegates returned home to promote the idea.

During the winter of 1936-37 the committee prepared for a founding convention to be held July 27 to July 29, 1937 at Grand Falls. All the unions in the country were circularized and invited to attend, and Duggan continued to gather advice and information from abroad. When the opening day arrived the response, while not overwhelming was at least sufficient to make a start. In all, ten unions sent delegates, seven of them international locals. The three railway unions which had attended the 1936 meeting (the ORT, the BRT and the Maintenance of Way Employees) could not attend.⁴⁶ They discovered that their international constitutions forbade them from belonging to central labour organizations not composed entirely of railroad unions. Fortunately the same restriction did not apply to the Railway Carmen, the IAM or the BRC thus assuring representation from the railway. Without it the fledgling federation would have almost certainly died. The Corner Brook IBPM joined the three mill unions which had attended the meeting in 1936, as did two independent unions connected to the operation of the Corner Brook mill — the Newfoundland Electrical Workers' Association of Corner Brook and the Newfoundland Electrical

⁴⁵ The Grand Falls Advertiser, October 23, 1936.

⁴⁶ Proceedings of the First Convention of the Newfoundland Trades and Labour Council (n.p., n.d.), pp. 1-5.

Workers' and Power House Employees of Deer Lake.⁴⁷ The Buchans Workmens' Protective Union [BWPU] completed the list. Although the unions attending represented only twenty percent of the organized workers in the country, the major population centres and the major industrial enterprises outside the fishery were all represented.⁴⁸ There were, however, three important groups not there — the clerical and manufacturing employees of St. John's who were unorganized, and a newly organized loggers' union that was experiencing a bitter internal battle for control that would lead to a split in its central and western sections.⁴⁹

⁴⁷First Proceedings, p. 6.

⁴⁸See Appendix, Table 1, footnote.

⁴⁹Of the approximately 17,000 organized workers in Newfoundland at this time, 10,000 were members of three logging unions. The largest was the Newfoundland Lumbermens' Association founded August 3, 1933 in Point Leamington by veteran woodsman J.J. (Joe) Thompson. Thompson had worked in the woods since he was eleven years old and therefore had little formal education but a wealth of practical logging experience. His lack of familiarity with parliamentary procedure and rules of order, lack of contact with formally organized labour unions, and his strong personality lead him to centralize power in the union around himself rather than encourage participation from the rank and file. This tendency intensified as the years went on and the result was that Thompson became a 'dictatorial' leader much in the style of John L. Lewis, whom he physically resembled. The second logging union was led by another rugged individualist, Ken Brown, and although the FPU had ceased to be an effective organization representing fishermen, it continued to represent former fishermen-loggers who were not primarily loggers. And finally, there was the Newfoundland Labourers' Union of Corner Brook. It too was lead by a powerful personality in the person of Pierce Fudge, a small businessman and schooner operator who had originally been one of Thompson's paid lieutenants on the West Coast. A split between the two men at the NLA convention in 1936 however caused Fudge to lead 1,500 west coast loggers out of the NLA to set up the new organization. Thus the logging unions, preoccupied with their own rivalries, large enough to feel no need to combine with other unions, and led by fiercely independent men suspicious of "foreign unions", shunned the opening convention of the NFL. It was a problem that plagued the NFL for the first twenty years of its existence until 1959 when the question was finally resolved by the bitter and divisive International Woodworkers of America strike. See Appendix, Table 1, footnote.

The convention opened with a format aimed at winning respectability for the new organization.⁵⁰ The first speaker was F.G. Bradley, the district magistrate for Grand Falls, representing the Commission of Government. The gesture made by the Commission was, as usual, cautious and Bradley went to great lengths to explain that he could not speak for the Commission, although he would convey representations to the commissioners. He was followed by V.S. Jones, the manager of the pulp and paper mill at Grand Falls, who spoke on the advantages of cooperation between Capital and Labour.⁵¹ Other speakers were the Reverend E.M. Bishop, a prominent Anglican clergyman and Harry Fletcher, secretary and general manager of the Grand Falls Co-operative Society. With these opening ceremonies at an end, the convention began its work in an atmosphere of anticipation, optimism and enthusiasm.⁵²

The delegates first appointed the usual standing committees on credentials, rules of order, ways and means, resolutions, auditing, courtesy, and the constitution and by-laws. After the adoption of a resolution of loyalty to His Majesty the King, the substance of the legislative program was tackled. A copy of the Nova Scotia Trade Union Act was circulated and presented as a model to replace the outmoded Newfoundland Trade Union Act of 1910. This was followed by discussion on workmen's compensation, minimum wages, hours

⁵⁰ First Proceedings, pp. 1-5.

⁵¹ First Proceedings, pp. 2-3.

⁵² Arthur Rowe, interview, March 1975.

of work, a pensions or retirement act, the establishment of a government employment bureau and the immigration laws.⁵³

Duggan and his organizing committee envisaged an organization modelled on the Trades and Labour Congress of Canada.⁵⁴ At Duggan's request the president of the TLC had sent Duggan a copy of its constitution. The delegates adopted the document as the constitution of the NTLC after making the required cosmetic changes.⁵⁵ In theory that made the NTLC an arm of the American Federation of Labour. Although at the beginning of its existence the TLC accepted all types of labour organizations (many of its affiliates were assemblies of the Knights of Labour) in 1902 the TLC was transformed into the equivalent of a state federation of the AFL.⁵⁶ The president of the AFL, Samuel Gompers, had decided socialist and nationalist elements in the TLC represented a threat to the AFL's claim over the whole of the North American Labour Movement. Through his Canadian organizer, John Flett (who was also a vice-president of the TLC), the 1902 TLC convention was packed with delegates from Canadian locals of international unions affiliated with the AFL. The Convention expelled the Knights of Labour

⁵³ First Proceedings, pp. 6-14.

⁵⁴ Duggan, "My Memoirs," p. 7.

⁵⁵ Constitution and By-laws of the Newfoundland Trades and Labour Council (n.p., 1933), p. 3; First Proceedings, p. 7.

⁵⁶ Robert Babcock, The A.F. of L. in Canada 1896-1908: A Study in American Labor Imperialism (An Arbor: University Microfilms, 1970), p. 228.

and declared that any union operating in a jurisdiction occupied by an AFL union a "dual organization" and therefore outside the "legitimate" Labour Movement. Furthermore, the only unions eligible for membership in the TLC were to be AFL affiliates and unions chartered directly by the TLC in fields where there were no AFL unions.

From this point on, the TLC took on the characteristics of the AFL. The AFL was not concerned with changing society but with improvements in wages, hours and working conditions within the existing capitalist system.⁵⁷ Unlike a significant minority of Canadian trade unionists, especially those in Western Canada, Gompers was completely opposed to direct political action.⁵⁸ The only political action he would allow was support for candidates who were friends of Labour. He was against the idea of forming an independent labour party or even establishing a relationship with an existing political party. The chosen instruments of action for the AFL were the international unions which were the sole reason for its existence. Thus, the AFL and the TLC confined themselves to arbitrating jurisdictional disputes between member unions and lobbying for legislation favourable to the spread of AFL style trade unions. The tendency of some TLC trade unionists towards political action did not die completely, however, and the TLC continued to lobby for social legislation in the interest of the entire

⁵⁷ Irving Abella, "The Canadian Labour Movement, Canadian Historical Society Booklet No. 28 (Ottawa: Canadian Historical Association, 1975), p. 4.

⁵⁸ Bernard Mandel, Samuel Gompers (Yellow Springs, Ohio: The Antioch Press, 1963), p. 87.

working class, although with a notable lack of enthusiasm.⁵⁹ Direct organizing work was left to the international unions whenever possible.

Since the main thrust behind the creation of a national federation of trade unions in Newfoundland was coming from men who were members of international unions it is not surprising they turned to the TLC and the AFL for guidance. But there were significant differences between the organization which the founders of the NTLC wanted and what existed on the mainland. Duggan and the others were Newfoundlanders first, trade unionists second and international trade unionists third. For Duggan the primary purpose of the formation of a national labour federation was not to solve inter-union jurisdictional disputes; it was "for the purpose of stimulating the spirit of independence in the lives of our fellow workers who were being degraded, and for alleviating the plight of our people which is becoming intolerable."⁶⁰ Unlike the AFL which was devoted to protecting the interests of elite skilled workers, Duggan saw trade unions as an instrument to lobby for reforms on behalf of the entire working class. He did agree with the AFL, however, that collective bargaining and organizing should be left to the unions and that direct political action had no place in the Labour Movement. Others, like the socialist Irving Fogwill, did not share all Duggan's opinions. They believed the NTLC should take the lead in organizing and wanted to see it involved in direct political action

⁵⁹ Logan, Trade Unions, p. 432.

⁶⁰ The Labour Herald, August 26, 1938.

even though the absence of a system of electoral politics rendered the possibility academic.⁶¹

Fortunately the TLC constitution was broad enough to encompass both points of view. Its stated objectives included organizing unions, furthering the spirit of international unionism, legislative lobbying, encouraging the sale of union goods, influencing public opinion in favour of organized labour, and advancing the interests of working people.⁶² Moreover, as a national labour central the NTLC would have the right to charter new unions, although a union could not be a member if its jurisdiction conflicted with an international union already affiliated. A particularly fortunate feature of the constitution was its approach to structure. Like Canada, Newfoundland was a country with a dispersed population, and over the years the TLC had developed a decentralized system of vice-presidents, provincial federations, city centrals and executive committees designed to cope with the large distances and problems of communications.⁶³ In adapting the system to Newfoundland the NTLC decided on an executive composed of a president, a secretary-treasurer and four vice-presidents, one each from the eastern, central, southern and western regions. In years when the president did not come from the capital city, St. John's, there would be an assistant secretary-treasurer appointed from St. John's to

⁶¹ Irving Fogwill, interview, June 1975. Mr. Fogwill served in various executive positions with the BRC Lodge 443 and in 1945 was one of the founders of a political Labour Party.

⁶² Logan, Trade Unions, pp. 59-71; NTLC Constitution, pp. 1-24.

⁶³ Logan, Trade Unions, p. 62.

facilitate contact with the government. Most of the important executive committees responsible for organizing new unions and encouraging affiliation by existing unions were to be set up in St. John's, Buchans, Grand Falls and Corner Brook. Like the AFL and the TLC, the NTLC decided to raise its operating revenue by a per capita tax on member unions based on size and type. International locals were assessed twenty-eight cents per member per year, national locals with less than 1,500 members eighteen cents a year, and national locals with more than 1,500 members ten cents a year.⁶⁴ In the area of legislative reform the delegates adopted ten policy resolutions. They included a call for a mandatory five day and forty hour week, the abolition of child labour, improvements in the Workmens' Compensation Act, the creation of a government pension program, and improvements in the Mines Inspection Act.⁶⁵

The convention's final item of business was to elect a new executive to replace the provisional committee. Duggan left no doubt he wanted the presidency and he won it by acclamation. In the vice-presidential elections Ron Fahey (IAM) was elected eastern vice-president; Charlie Raines (Local 64, IBPS and PMW) western Vice-president; Jim Bragg (Local 63, IBPS and PMW) central vice-president; and M.F. Armstrong of the Buchans Workmens' Protective Union southern vice-president. The secretary was Jim Hannaford (the third member of Local 63 on the executive) and the assistant secretary-treasurer, F.A.F. Lush

⁶⁴ First Proceedings, p. 12.

⁶⁵ First Proceedings, pp. 10-11.

of the IAM in St. John's.⁶⁶ Of the small pool of trade union leaders in the country at the time these were among the best and would prove capable of leading the NTLC through its early years.

The delegates that gathered in Grand Falls in late July 1937 accomplished a great deal in three days of meetings. They adopted a structure well-suited to conditions in Newfoundland, developed a strategy for expansion, outlined a political reform program and adopted a constitution. Finally they agreed to ask the Commission of Government to adopt legislation similar to the Nova Scotia Trade Union Act guaranteeing the unions greater legal protection in their attempts to organize.⁶⁷ Nonetheless, at this stage the NTLC was still basically a paper organization. The experience of the TLC demonstrated that an organization could be many things according to its constitution, but what it was in reality depended on the elements of its mandate which it chose to emphasize. For the moment the priority for the NTLC was survival.

Although previous federations were short-lived, by 1935 new factors existed in Newfoundland which increased the probability that this venture would be a success. The presence of large-scale industry was greater, wage cuts had left a legacy of bitterness, and there were more workers in international unions than at any time in the past. As a result, a growing number of Newfoundland trade unionists were

⁶⁶ First Proceedings, p. 14.

⁶⁷ Lidell, Survey, p. 99.

CHAPTER FOUR
CONSOLIDATION

If the NTLC was to develop into an enduring institution its founders knew they would have to expand greatly the number and variety of workers the NTLC represented. It was a difficult challenge, for Newfoundland had shown itself to be a hostile environment for the growth and proliferation of permanent trade unions. Thus, the NTLC moved cautiously. To forestall possible attacks the St. John's Executive Committee, in the midst of a subsequent organizing campaign, published the following affidavit:

We the St. John's Executive Committee of the Newfoundland Trades and Labour Council make oath and swear, that:

We, neither individually nor collectively, receive any remuneration, emoluments, honourariums of any kind whatsoever from the said Newfoundland Trades and Labour Council, nor from any other source for our work in the Council. Neither are we permitted personal expense accounts.

We also swear that no organization - Neither the A.F. of L. or the C.I.O. nor any other group - either directly or indirectly is behind the Nfld. movement financially or otherwise. Neither was the movement prompted from abroad in any shape or form. We swear that the Newfoundland Trades and Labour Council was planned and inaugurated solely by Newfoundland Trade Unionists.

We swear that no money is paid out of the Nfld. Council's Treasury to any outside Council, Congress or Federation.

We swear that we none or [sic] us, neither individually nor collectively have been paid fees of any kind for organizing the various Trade Unions who [sic] are chartered or affiliated with the Council.

And finally, we swear that the Officers and Members of the Newfoundland Trades and Labour Council are

receiving first-hand exposure to developments in the Labour Movement in the rest of North America, giving them an outside perspective on their own situation in Newfoundland.⁶⁸ Through these men the revival of trade unionism which started in Canada and the United States shortly after the passage of the National Recovery Act in 1933 was spilling over into Newfoundland. Moreover, many of these men possessed outstanding ability and dedication. Walter Sparks was not an exception among labour leaders in Newfoundland when it came to qualities like character and education. Newfoundland, with its foreign-owned companies, family-dominated businesses and pervasive fishing economy had almost no middle class. In Canada or the United States working class youngsters could move far more easily into middle management, law or some other escape from their background. Here, where there were fewer opportunities, the Labour Movement retained men of exceptional leadership ability. Thus when Newfoundland's economy developed to the point where a bonafide Trade Union Movement was feasible, the leadership was there to promote it. As past experience had shown, however, founding a central labour organization was a far easier proposition than sustaining its existence. Having made the first step the future of the NTLC was by no means assured.

⁶⁸ Ballam, interview, February 1975.

utterly and unreservedly opposed to the tenets of Communism and Fascism or any similar ism and forthright [sic] declare ourselves adherents of Democratic Principles and unalterable believers in the Christian foundation of Civilization and unswervably loyal to our King and Country.¹

In the judgement of the NTLC leadership, their chances of success were directly related to the degree of "respectability" they could project to the public. Any hint of confrontation tactics, of foreign radicalism, of violence, of wilful disruption was to be avoided.² Underlying this tactic were the dominant social and political values in Newfoundland — in the jargon of the day "British Democracy" or "British Fair Play".³ A writer commenting on the founding of the NTLC called the event "a landmark in Newfoundland of all that is sound in the British traditions of labour and the British Commonwealth of Nations."⁴ At a meeting of the Barbers' Union, "the British Democratic System" was extolled as the only decent way of life "in a world beset with crack-pot ideas and philosophies."⁵

Central to this concept was the belief that social relations in a British country such as Newfoundland must be based on

¹Untitled affidavit, May 28, 1938 (mimeographed copy in the possession of the author).

²Fredrick Lush, interview, March 1975.

³The Evening Telegram, January 28, March 19, 1938.

⁴The Evening Telegram, August 10, 1937.

⁵The Evening Telegram, March 19, 1938.

principles of compromise, fair-mindedness, and mutual respect.⁶ To act otherwise was not to be 'British' and not to be 'British' was to cut oneself off from social acceptability.

When applied to industrial relations the concept meant that the most socially acceptable course of action for Capital and Labour was one of enlightened cooperation.⁷ According to this philosophy Capital and Labour were mutually dependent partners working together for the good of all, and in 1937 Newfoundland labour leaders concluded, as had their predecessors, that their best chance for success lay in the adoption of a policy of conciliation.

They publically characterized their efforts as an attempt to correct a regrettable situation in which the proper balance between Capital and Labour had swung in favour of the former — a stance which found broad acceptance amongst the Newfoundland public.⁸ *The Evening Telegram's* 1937 Labour Day editorial summarized the attitude when it stated that:

Few will begrudge to labour the benefits of increased wages and shorter hours or the security which accrues from collective bargaining powers, but the manner they have sought in America and

⁶ Janet Roebuck, The Making of Modern English Society from 1850 (New York: Charles Scribner's and Sons, 1973), p. 19.

⁷ The Evening Telegram, February 4, 1938.

⁸ Report of the Proceedings of the Second Annual Convention of the Newfoundland Trades and Labour Council (n.p., n.d.), p. 3, 35; The Evening Telegram, February 4, 1938.

the violence and bloodshed, which often accompanied by the strikes of unions, have caused a revolt of public opinion.⁹

In short, the basic right of belonging to a trade union was accepted as consistent with 'British' justice, while the confrontation tactics of the Congress of Industrial Organizations [CIO] were rejected. For the NFL, made up as it was of American-based international unions, this was an important public relations problem and hence the affidavit. But as the delegates made their way home from the founding convention, it was a problem for the future.

A more immediate concern was to bring the existence of the new federation to the notice of the workers, for while the convention made a strong emotional impact on the delegates, it attracted little attention in the media. *The Evening Telegram* carried a short five-paragraph news story on its second news page noting that a federation of Newfoundland trade unions had been formed at Grand Falls.¹⁰ It did not consider the event important enough to warrant editorial comment.

The Letters to the Editor column failed to produce messages of either congratulations or criticism, other than those sent by the delegates themselves.¹¹ If the Federation was to fulfill its intended role as an effective lobby for legislative reform, it was essential to be perceived as an important and influential institution

⁹ The Evening Telegram, September 6, 1937.

¹⁰ The Evening Telegram, August 10, 1937.

¹¹ The Evening Telegram, October 8, 1937.

whose advice could not be ignored by government. Thus the Federation had to make an impact on the public consciousness and do it before the initial enthusiasm generated wore thin amongst the convention delegates. In this the four regional executive committees were the key.

The obvious first step in establishing credibility was to increase the number of workers affiliated to the NTLC.¹² Since the attempt to recruit existing unions outside the NTLC had met with little success, priority was given to organizing new unions.¹³ The executive committees returned to their regions and began to seek out groups of potential trade unionists. Of the four regions in which the NTLC had committees the most important was St. John's which, although it was the most heavily populated area of the country, had a relatively low level of organization. Moreover, a large increase in union activity in the country's capital would have the greatest impact on the minds of the public and the Commission of Government.

Fortunately for NTLC, the St. John's committee contained some of its most able leaders. Led by Walter Sparks, it consisted of officials of the three unions organized at the Railway between 1934 and 1936.¹⁴ Ron Fahey, Alexander Piercy and F.A.F. Lush of the IAM, Eleazer Davis and Frank Fogwill of the Carmen, Irving Fogwill of the

¹² First Proceedings, p. 8; Fogwill, "The Brotherhood in Newfoundland," p. 218.

¹³ T.K. Liddell, "Confidential Government of Newfoundland Preliminary Memorandum on Labour Survey, September-October 1938" (Manchester: February, 1939), p. 7. Located at the Provincial Archives, St. John's, Newfoundland.

¹⁴ Second Proceedings, p. 2.

to call a founding meeting and in characteristic Sparks style. It was the crucial first test for the organizing campaign. If it failed the entire organizing drive, and perhaps the future of the NTLC, would be thrown into doubt. On the other hand, success would give workers reluctant to offend their employers by becoming involved in trade union activities the courage to form organizations of their own.

In conjunction with some of the clerks, Sparks drafted a model constitution and bye-laws for the new organization and reserved the Pitts Memorial Hall for February 17th.¹⁷ To gain the confidence of the clerical rank and file Sparks knew they would have to be convinced the NTLC was a strong 'professional' organization. The clerks were being asked to make a public commitment that could cost them their jobs if their employers reacted negatively. In the midst of a depression, when a job meant the difference between respectability and the humiliation of the dole, it was a serious step. It was therefore essential that the NTLC not appear amateurish. Since the St. John's committee had only seven dollars in its treasury and consisted entirely of volunteers that was not necessarily the case. Still, if the committee was to succeed in convincing workers to overcome their initial hesitations, then at least the illusion of professionalism had to be created, and it was.

From the rank and file of the Railway unions were drawn the most impressive, dignified-looking grey and white headed workers.¹⁸

¹⁷ The Evening Telegram, February 18, 1938.

¹⁸ Walter Sparks, interview, June 1975.

Clerks met in the BRC's office over a Water Street Bank immediately after the convention to plan their strategy.¹⁵ After discussing various possibilities they decided that each man would take responsibility for one occupational category. Each organizer would then go to any establishment in the city that employed large numbers of the appropriate type of worker and talk to those possibly interested in forming a union. Once a few willing contacts were found they would be left to spread the idea amongst their fellow workers until enough interest was created to warrant the surreptitious distribution of union cards. The cards were not actual union memberships but declarations of intent signifying the signator would support the formation of a union. After a sufficient number of cards were signed the NTLC would call a meeting and ask prospective members to pay a fifty cent initiation fee, adopt a constitution and set of by-laws, and elect a slate of officers. Armed with a definite plan of action the seven members of the executive committee began in the fall of 1937 to make their approaches to Water Street clerks, factory workers and unorganized tradesmen.

The task of organizing retail clerks (traditionally the most difficult group to organize) fell to Walter Sparks.¹⁶ In the six months after the convention he contacted workers in more than seventy Water Street firms promoting the concept of a single union to encompass all retail clerical employees in St. John's. In February he was ready

¹⁵ Irving Fogwill, interview, June 1975; Robert Fogwill, interview, March 1975. Mr. Fogwill was secretary of the Railway Clerks' Union during the 1940s and 1950s; Fredrick Lush, interview, February 1975; Walter Sparks, interview, June 1975.

¹⁶ Fredrick Lush, interview, March 1975.

functioning of a trade union and explained the philosophy of the international trade union movement. The presidents of the three St. John's unions voiced their approval of the venture, and finally Sparks, whose duty it was to put the all-important question to the audience, rose and asked whether the assembled gathering was in favour of forming a trade union. Five-hundred and fifty members signed up on the spot. In quick succession, an executive was elected from a shadow executive formed by Sparks previous to the meeting to eliminate the embarrassing possibility that the union might fail for lack of an executive.²¹ A name, the Newfoundland Protective Association of Shop and Office Employees [NPASOE] was chosen, and a constitution and set of bye-laws adopted.²² It was well after midnight when the meeting ended, and by the time it did the committee was convinced that the success of their campaign was assured. The next day the newspapers carried a full account of the meeting, emphasizing the enthusiasm and the flawless organization by the NTLC.²³ In following weeks similar meetings were held for other occupational groupings. In March the remnant of the Tinsmiths' Union was revived to become the Tin and Sheet Metal Workers' Association.²⁴ The almost defunct Carpenters' Union became the Carpenters' Protective

²¹ Walter Sparks, interview, June 1975.

²² The Evening Telegram, February 18, 1938.

²³ The Evening Telegram, February 18, 1938; The Daily News, February 18, 1938.

²⁴ The Labour Herald, August 28, 1938.

Dressed in their Sunday-best, they were lined up in solemn rows on the speakers' platform for no other reason than appearance. The handsomest young railway workers were chosen as ushers whose duty it was to show to their seats the many young ladies (who accounted for a large proportion of the clerical employees) with appropriate deference and dignity. And from amongst the clerks most active in organizing the union, arrangements were made for members of the audience to rise with apparent spontaneity, proposing resolutions and framing motions. Finally, a roster of the most important trade union speakers available was arranged. First would come Ron Fahey, the NTLC's first vice-president and a good natural orator with a reputation for toughness and hard bargaining. He would be followed by other committee members and in turn by the presidents of the three oldest unions in St. John's — the Coopers', the Longshoremens' Protective Union [LSPU] and the Truckmens' Protective Union [TPU]. Sparks, the only committee member with previous experience at platform speaking, would conclude the evening.¹⁹

On the night of February 17th, with all the advance organizing and publicity done, the committee went nervously to the hall to await the response to their efforts. By eight o'clock they were jubilant. An estimated 650 clerks came to hear what the NTLC had to offer.²⁰ As planned, Fahey spoke on the aims and objectives of the NTLC. Then Eleazer Davis, Irving Fogwill, Frank Fogwill, Alexander Piercy and Arch Lush covered the various aspects of the day-to-day

¹⁹Walter Sparks, interview, June 1975.

²⁰The Evening Telegram, February 18, 1938.

Association, and with NTLC help its membership grew from ten to 300 in a matter of a few months.²⁵ Also in March two entirely new unions were founded — the Newfoundland United Barbers' Association (an organization covering small barbershop owners and employees) and the Garment Workers' Protective Union (covering employees at several small clothing manufacturing plants in the city).²⁶ In April these groups were followed into unions by city council employees, telephone operators and electricians at the Avalon Telephone Company, and printers at various city newspapers and print shops.²⁷ Then came the creation of a second lodge of the IAM encompassing city garage mechanics, two more BRC lodges — one at Argentia and one at Port aux Basques — the formation of the Aerated Water, Brewery, Butterine, Confectionary and Tobacco Workers' Union, the Cordage, Twine and Allied Workers' Protective Union, the Journeymen and Apprentice Painters' Union and the Plumbers and Pipefitters' Protective Association.²⁸ In addition, the Coopers' Union, the Bakers' Welfare Association (which became the Bakery Workers' Protective Union), and the International Boot and Shoe Workers' Union were

²⁵ The Evening Telegram, June 13, 1938; The Federator, Vol. 3, No. 2, 12.

²⁶ The Evening Telegram, March 19, 1938; The Labour Herald, August 26, 1938; "Newfoundland Register of Trade Unions" (St. John's: Mimeographed, n.d., complete to 1938), 86 sheets, unpaginated. Located at the main library, Memorial University of Newfoundland.

²⁷ The Evening Telegram, May 2, 1938; The Labour Herald, August 26, 1938.

²⁸ "Register of Trade Unions"; Second Proceedings, pp. 20-21.

persuaded to affiliate their memberships to the NTLC.²⁹ By September 3,940 workers had been organized into new or revived organizations in St. John's alone.³⁰ The other committees added four unions of shop workers — Grand Falls, Botwood, Bishop's Falls and Corner Brook — to the total.³¹ The organizing drive surpassed the most optimistic expectations of the NTLC.

It is interesting that of the seventeen unions either founded or revived, fourteen were independent Newfoundland locals with no connection to the internationals. Even though the organizing committees were almost entirely composed of members from Newfoundland locals of AFL unions, these men did not see their primary goal as recruiting for the internationals.³² Their goal was to achieve a better standard of living for as many workers as possible by helping them form trade unions regardless of affiliation. In practical terms they recognized that many Newfoundland workers could not afford to belong to international unions. Workers at the paper mills or the railway — the elite wage earners of the Newfoundland labour force — could afford to pay the high monthly dues required, but most unorganized workers were so poorly paid they could not.³³ The wisdom of this judgment was reflected in the figures. In just one year membership in the

²⁹ Second Proceedings, pp. 20-21.

³⁰ Calculated from the raw data by the author.

³¹ The Evening Telegram, September 6, 1938.

³² Fredrick Lush, interview, March 1975.

³³ Second Proceedings, pp. 36-42.

NTLC tripled both in terms of per capita membership and in the number of unions enrolled. Most importantly, the NTLC succeeded in establishing its credibility within the Newfoundland public, and as if to underline the point it preceded its second annual convention in St. John's with a giant Labour Day parade.³⁴

In all, 4,000 workers, representing twenty-two unions accompanied by forty floats and five bands, marched through the streets in the first Labour Day parade in the city since 1908.³⁵ The degree of respect the NTLC had earned was evidenced by the fact the mile and a half long procession was reviewed by the governor from the west gate of Government House where he received an oath of loyalty from the NTLC executive. After the parade was over Duggan and the other members of the executive were given the additional privilege of addressing the country over VONF, the government radio station. The next day *The Evening Telegram* devoted a full page's coverage to the event — the same amount the declaration of World War II was to receive one year later.³⁶ In contrast to its organizational success, however, the NTLC efforts in its other major area of concern, legislative reform, met with complete failure.

After the 1937 convention the NTLC executive sent copies of their resolutions to the Commission of Government for consideration. To their great surprise, the Commission returned them with the advice

³⁴ The Evening Telegram, September 5, 6, 1938.

³⁵ The Evening Telegram, September 6, 1938.

³⁶ The Evening Telegram, September 4, 1939.

that all requests for changes in legislation would have to be put into legal draft form before they would be considered.³⁷ Given the meagre finances of the NTLC the possibility of hiring a lawyer to do this was out of the question, and so in September of 1937 NTLC secretary Jim Hannaford and president Duggan decided to go to St. John's to meet with F.R. Emerson the Commissioner of Justice.³⁸ Accompanied by members of the St. John's executive committee they discussed the NTLC's legislative program with the Commissioner, particularly the need for a new Trade Union Act. Duggan quoted the Nova Scotia Trade Union Act to Emerson, characterizing it as an admirable example of progressive legislation, and Emerson in turn requested that he be sent a copy of the Act for study.³⁹ The NTLC felt this was the first step in a process of negotiation between their organization and the government, but to their dismay the meeting turned out to be their last contact with the Commission for the next year. On returning to Grand Falls Duggan sent a copy of the Nova Scotia Act to Emerson, but he received no further communication — not even an acknowledgement Emerson had received his letter.⁴⁰ The Shop Workers' Unions in Grand Falls and Corner Brook also sent requests to the Commission, asking for legislation to regulate holidays and restrict business hours in retail outlets.⁴¹ The Grand

³⁷ Second Proceedings, p. 24.

³⁸ Second Proceedings, p. 25.

³⁹ Second Proceedings, p. 25.

⁴⁰ Second Proceedings, p. 25.

⁴¹ Second Proceedings, pp. 51-56.

Falls union received an acknowledgement of its request but no apparent consideration. The Corner Brook union did not receive a reply.

To the NTLC and its member unions this behaviour was taken as an indication the Commission did not consider the unions sufficiently important to merit a reply. Departmental correspondence, however, reveals this was not the case. The Commission was caught unprepared by the sudden explosion of trade unionism.⁴² There was no department of labour and no statistics kept on labour unions; nothing was known of the size, history or character of the Newfoundland Labour Movement. The Commission had neither the personnel nor the expertise to deal with requests for legislation, and therefore in May of 1938 wrote to the British Home Office to request the services of an experienced member of the British Department of Labour to come to Newfoundland to conduct a study of trade unions and industrial relations.⁴³

The British government agreed and on September 7, 1938, the day after the second annual convention of the NTLC opened in the ballroom of the Newfoundland Hotel, Thomas K. Liddell the chief conciliation officer of the British Ministry of Labour, arrived in St. John's.⁴⁴ It was the first positive note for the NTLC in an otherwise

⁴²Secretary of State for Dominion Affairs to the Governor of Newfoundland, Confidential despatch No. 243, July 22, 1938. Located at the Provincial Archives, St. John's, Newfoundland.

⁴³Liddell, "Preliminary Memorandum," p. 1.

⁴⁴Second Proceedings, p. 60.

frustrating year of dealing with government. Legislative disappointments, however, were quickly forgotten as the NTLC's convention opened on a wave of optimism generated by the successful organizing drive — a success reflected in the altered size and composition of the convention.⁴⁵

Delegate attendance more than doubled from twenty-four to sixty-five and local and national unions now outnumbered internationals eighteen to eleven compared with the seven to three majority in favour of the internationals in 1937.⁴⁶ Another change was reflected in the regional distribution of the unions. In 1937 only three St. John's based unions were represented; this time St. John's unions were a majority of nineteen to ten.⁴⁷ Despite these changes few differences arose during the convention on regional lines or between national and international unions.⁴⁸ The trade unionists affiliated with the international unions continued to lead the NTLC by virtue of their greater experience and the loyalty paid them as founders of the resurgent Labour Movement. With the exception of the International Boot and Shoe Workers' Union, all the new unions attending the convention had been organized by the NTLC committees. Quite naturally the novice trade unionists, many with less than four months trade union experience, continued to look to Duggan, Sparks and the others for guidance.

⁴⁵ Second Proceedings, pp. 20-21.

⁴⁶ Second Proceedings, pp. 20-21.

⁴⁷ Second Proceedings, pp. 20-21.

⁴⁸ Second Proceedings, pp. 1-102.

Lastly, it was recognized by all the delegates that unity was essential if trade unions were going to survive and progress.⁴⁹ Thus, the second NTLC convention was largely devoted to the consolidation and refinement of the structure created in 1937 in the light of a year's practical experience. This involved the adoption of additions to the constitution, a model constitution for chartered affiliates, a reassessment of financing, and the addition of several planks to the legislative platform.⁵⁰

The additions to the constitution were for the most part a consolidation of resolutions passed at the 1937 convention on membership, purpose, officers and revenue plus the addition of articles on convention procedure, qualifications for voting, and executive duties and were therefore disposed of with little comment.⁵¹ The one point to provoke discussion was the question of CIO unions seeking membership in the NTLC. Since there were no CIO unions in Newfoundland at the time, the convention agreed to defer the decision until a CIO union did apply for membership.⁵²

If the adoption of the revised constitution sparked little debate the same was not true of the proposed model constitution for unions

⁴⁹ Second Proceedings, p. 53.

⁵⁰ T.W. Sanger, "Report of T.W. Sanger," Pulp, Sulphite and Paper Mill Workers' Journal (September 4, 1938), 4; Second Proceedings, pp. 1-102.

⁵¹ Second Proceedings, pp. 78-83.

⁵² Second Proceedings, p. 73.

chartered by the NTLC. A clause in the model constitution required the chartered affiliates to seek the permission of the NTLC before they could strike.⁵³ This would have given the NTLC powers similar to those exercised by the head offices of international unions and a far greater degree of centralized control over member unions than either the AFL or the TLC. In fact, the NTLC already provided the services of an international business agent to some of its affiliates. It drew up collective bargaining proposals for the more inexperienced trade unionists, raised strike funds and on occasion even sat in on negotiations.⁵⁴ But a majority of the delegates (including an over-worked executive) did not want to see the NTLC assume more authority than it already possessed. The clause was amended to read "No chartered union shall have the power to take a strike vote until the Council has been consulted." However, even the compromise resolution was evidence the NTLC, partly by design and partly because of the weakness of its member unions, wielded more authority over its membership than either the AFL or the TLC.

A third point which aroused considerable debate was finances.⁵⁵ The report of the Ways and Means Committee recommended that per capita fees be maintained at the level approved at the 1937 convention — twenty-eight cents per member a year for international locals and ten to eighteen cents a year for national unions. Arch Noseworthy, of the Corner Brook IBPM, opposed the report maintaining

⁵³ Liddell, Survey, p. 51; Second Proceedings, pp. 63-66.

⁵⁴ Walter Sparks, interview, June 1975; Fredrick Lush, interview, March 1975.

⁵⁵ Liddell, Survey, p. 50; Second Proceedings, pp. 51-55.

the tax was insignificant and that at least ten cents a month per member was required if the NTLC was to become a strong organization. His suggestion drew strong opposition from delegates representing other internationally affiliated locals, who countered that their members already paid from seventy cents to \$1.50 a month to their international headquarters in addition to NTLC dues. Most agreed that the NTLC needed more money but suggested that it be raised by increasing the per capita tax on national unions since they received most of the services. Delegates from the national unions pointed out that if they were forced to raise their fees at a time when they were trying to recruit members and build up their organizations, it could force them out of existence. After several hours of debate the 1937 fee structure was adopted unchanged but with the proviso that a referendum be held amongst the entire NTLC membership proposing that fees be set at five cents a month for all unions.

While important, matters of finance and the constitution consumed less time than the debates on legislative resolutions. Legislative lobbying was supposed to be the primary function of the NTLC and the legislative platform received considerable attention. Added to demands made the year before (implementation of a five-day/forty-hour work week, abolition of child labour, improvements in the Mine Inspection Act, adoption of a new Trade Union Act and creation of a Workers' Retirement Act) was a demand that employers of twenty workers or more be required to grant two weeks paid holidays after one year's service.⁵⁶

⁵⁶ Second Proceedings, pp. 42-43.

In addition the delegates recommended the implementation of shop hours acts for Corner Brook and the Exploits Valley region, that companies with more than 600 employees and companies with company towns of 1,200 persons or more be required to employ a minimum of two doctors, and that the Immigration Act be enforced to prevent employers from importing so-called "specialized labour" (British professionals) when qualified Newfoundlanders were available to fill the jobs.⁵⁷ Most important, a model Trade Union Act forbidding employers from interfering with the organization of trade unions and making collective bargaining compulsory when a majority of an employer's workers were represented by a trade union was adopted as official NTLC policy.⁵⁸ In addition to these resolutions the convention also adopted several resolutions focusing on the problems of individual member unions. Included in this category were demands for an investigation into the working conditions of out-port coopers, a request from the plumbers union to be allowed to sit on the Municipal Board of Examiners in St. John's for journeymen plumbers, and a protest from the Railway Carmen over the loss of jobs owing to the conversion of locomotives and steamships from coal to oil.⁵⁹ In all, the delegates considered twenty resolutions during the five day convention. The work seemed well worthwhile when, at the final session, Duggan announced that Commissioner Emerson had assured him that morning that the commissioners intended to deal with the Shop

⁵⁷ First Proceedings, p. 10; Second Proceedings, pp. 51-55, 67-70.

⁵⁸ Second Proceedings, pp. 46-48.

⁵⁹ Second Proceedings, pp. 56-59, 62-63, 91-92.

Hours Act for Grand Falls at their next meeting and would investigate the possibility of a similar act for Corner Brook.⁶⁰ Duggan added that Emerson also told him the draft Trade Union Act and all other matters pertaining to Labour would be submitted to Liddell for consideration.

After only one year's operation the NTLC executive had made significant progress towards the fulfillment of its major goals, an achievement recognized by the delegates when they re-elected the entire executive on the last day of the convention.⁶¹ But as the NTLC entered its second year the executive was faced with two continuing challenges — first, to convince the loggers' and longshoremen's unions to join the NTLC and, more importantly, to ensure the survival of the unions they had founded since the last convention.

Although public opinion now favoured the formation of trade unions many employers still opposed the idea. As T.K. Liddell later described it in his report:

There still exists in the minds of certain of the employers of labour in Newfoundland the idea that a trade union is something with which they should have nothing whatever to do. They understand readily enough the necessity for the organization of the employers although there it is sometimes difficult to get entirely co-ordinated action, but organization of the worker in his trade union to protect his interests and impose his position is, in their view, something quite unnecessary and, in fact harmful.⁶²

Employer resistance took several forms. Some, like Ayre's and Sons,

⁶⁰ Second Proceedings, p. 99.

⁶¹ Second Proceedings, pp. 92-96.

⁶³ Liddell, Survey, p. 133.

tried to buy off their employees. Four days after the formation of NPASOE, Ayre's management announced a bonus and wage increase for all employees effective March 1, 1938.⁶³ Similarly, East End Bakeries granted their employees a wage increase "due to the fine co-operation and excellent work of the employees."⁶⁴ In St. Lawrence, miners in the newly-created St. Lawrence Workers' Protective Union received a "voluntary" increase of ten percent (two cents an hour) as a Christmas gift from the company.⁶⁵ But most employers who chose to oppose the formation of unions did so by refusing to grant recognition to the new unions.

Even before the opening of the second annual NFL convention in September 1938 the newly-chartered Bakery Workers' Protective Union had become embroiled in a bitter strike against several St. John's bread and biscuit manufacturers.⁶⁶ Earlier that spring the Union had submitted its contract proposals to the employers and succeeded in signing agreements with a few of them. The remainder of the employers, however, decided to form a common front to oppose the Union. Through the agency of the Association of Newfoundland Industries, an organization of small manufacturers in the St. John's area, the employers pooled their resources and hired the best legal advice available (lawyer J.B. McEvoy) to assist their negotiating team.⁶⁷ In theory it

⁶³ The Evening Telegram, February 18, 1938.

⁶⁴ The Evening Telegram, April 26, 1938.

⁶⁵ The Evening Telegram, February 1, 1940.

⁶⁶ The Federator, Souvenir Edition (July 1951), 19; The Labour Herald, September 16, 1938; The Evening Telegram, July 22, 1938.

⁶⁷ The Evening Telegram, July 22, 1938.

strike received the full support of the other NTLC unions in St. John's. They raised money through benefit concerts, public collections, donations from their own funds and organized a hard breads boycott.⁷³ It was not enough. Eventually the strike was broken and 150 men and women lost their jobs.⁷⁴

The Electrical, Telephone and Allied Workers' Protective Association representing forty-four telephone operators and fifteen men in the electrical department struck the Avalon Telephone Company on October 22.⁷⁵ Their demands were for a regular nine-hour day, a \$60 a month salary, and a closed shop for telephone operators who were then working four to ten hour days for \$25 to \$35 a month.⁷⁶ The company refused to negotiate until the demand for a closed shop was removed. Within four days they had filled the jobs of the operators and convinced most of the men in the electrical department to return to work.

As serious as these defeats were for the individual unions and workers involved they did not visibly affect the bargaining position of the other NTLC unions. The international locals continued to make advances in wages and working conditions. The mill unions won the

⁷³ Fredrick Lush, interview, March 1975; The Labour Herald, August 26, 1938.

⁷⁴ Liddell, Survey, p. 50; The Federator, Souvenir Edition, 19.

⁷⁵ The Federator, Souvenir Edition; The Evening Telegram, October 22, 1938.

⁷⁶ The Evening Telegram, October 22, 1938.

was a sound idea but it was only partially successful. The union struck on July 22 and after a few days, all the soft bread manufacturers capitulated. They signed a contract which included a ten percent across-the-board wage increase, a reduced work week with no loss in pay, an \$18.00 a week minimum wage for male employees, and a closed shop.⁶⁸ But the hard bread manufacturers such as Mammy's Purity Factories and Browning Harvey continued to hold out by virtue of the long lasting nature of their product.⁶⁹ For the soft bread manufacturers the strike meant an immediate suspension of sales and financial loss but the hard bread and biscuit manufacturers could continue to supply their customers from stocks. Thus, these manufacturers slowly resumed production — first by staffing their machines with management personnel and then by hiring and training new staff.⁷⁰ After the second week of the strike the companies published advertisements in the newspapers inviting applications for employment from the strikers, whom they said would be hired back without prejudice.⁷¹ The advertisements produced few defections from the Union, but they did stoke the emotions of the Union membership who began to intimidate the workers crossing their picket lines, which resulted in several court prosecutions against the strikers.⁷² The

⁶⁸ The Evening Telegram, August 2, 1938. This edition contains a verbatim transcript of the contract submitted by the Bakery Workers' Union to the employers.

⁶⁹ The Federator, Souvenir Edition, 19; The Evening Telegram, July 30, 1938.

⁷⁰ Liddell, Survey, p. 50; The Federator, Souvenir Edition, 19.

⁷¹ The Evening Telegram, August 10, 1938.

⁷² The Evening Telegram, August 29, 1938.

eight-hour day and some railway unions succeeded in increasing wages by as much as a hundred percent in two years.⁷⁷ Several of the NFL's chartered unions managed to record small monetary gains as well, although most contracts concentrated on seniority and job security rather than money.⁷⁸ Thus after a year's operations most of the NTLC unions had made enough progress to ensure at least their short term survival in the midst of an increasingly severe economic situation.

As an examination of relief figures show, there appeared to be signs of improvement in the employment situation in 1937 and 1938. From July 1936 to July 1937 the number of persons on the hated "dole" dropped from 41,664 to 28,037, mainly due to increased activity in wood cutting operations, highroad maintenance, the construction of the Newfoundland airport at Gander, a revival of the mining operation at Bell Island and increased activity in the fishery.⁷⁹ By mid-1938, however, the economy had again begun to falter as the paper companies began to lay off loggers and the airport neared completion. Relief figures for June show an increase from 42,992 in 1937 to 46,049 in 1938 to 80,684 in 1939.⁸⁰ A visiting British newspaper reported called Newfoundland "an Imperial slum";

⁷⁷ W.E. Greening, Paper Makers in Canada (Cornwall, Ontario: Intern Press, 1952), p. 71; The Evening Telegram, May 7, 1938.

⁷⁸ Liddell, Survey, pp. 92-93.

⁷⁹ The Evening Telegram, August 26, 1937.

⁸⁰ The Evening Telegram, July 19, 17, 1938.

Half the population of 350,000 lives on the border line of starvation. Almost a quarter of the total is unemployed and the figures leap up yearly. Some fifty thousand more who are lucky enough to be employed receive wages which still deny them a livelihood. Malnutrition is widespread and every year cuts the sore deeper into the lives of the people.⁸¹

Not only was there massive unemployment, the cost of living was thirty to forty percent higher than elsewhere in North America.⁸² According to a government survey, on January 1, 1939 the minimum cost of living for a family of six in Grand Falls-Windsor was \$24.07 a week, while a year earlier Commissioner John Hope Simpson had put the figure in St. John's at \$120 a month.⁸³ For unorganized workers even those bare minimums were out of reach. Labourers clearing snow in St. John's earned twenty-five cents an hour or \$12.50 a week in the unlikely event they could obtain fifty hours work in a single week.⁸⁴ Many miners in St. Lawrence received nineteen and one-half cents an hour, while in 1937 factory girls in St. John's received as little as \$2.50 for a forty-five to fifty hour week, young men \$4 to \$6 a week.⁸⁵ Many domestic servant girls were little better than indentured slaves often earning as little as \$4 a month plus room and board for working in private homes or restaurants.⁸⁶

⁸¹The Evening Telegram, March 30, 1939.

⁸²The Evening Telegram, January 12, 1938; Liddell, Survey, p. 52.

⁸³The Evening Telegram, January 12, 1938.

⁸⁴The Evening Telegram, January 22, 1938.

⁸⁵The Evening Telegram, February 7, 1937, February 1, 1940.

⁸⁶The Evening Telegram, December 21, 1937.

Organized workers, on the other hand, were in a more advantageous position. Miners at Buchans received thirty-nine cents an hour while those at Bell Island, who were unorganized, received thirty-three and one-half cents an hour.⁸⁷ In 1938 the Carpenters' Protective Association managed to raise their wage rate from forty cents to fifty cents an hour after a short strike.⁸⁸ After only one contract general labourers at the railway were receiving twenty-nine cents to thirty-three cents an hour, and skilled tradesmen fifty to sixty cents an hour. The highest paid workers in Newfoundland were the members of the IBPM in Grand Falls and Corner Brook who received \$1.54 an hour.⁸⁹ In short, the evidence demonstrates that organized workers, even in the newest NTLC unions, were able to raise their wages above those of unorganized workers. Thus 1937-38 was on balance a year of progress for NTLC unions at the bargaining table.

A major disappointment for the NTLC was its failure to attract the logging and longshore unions into the organization. Individually strong and independent, these unions saw no advantage in affiliating with the NTLC.⁹⁰ The NLA, for instance, succeeded in

⁸⁷Liddell, Survey, pp. 60, 62.

⁸⁸The Evening Telegram, June 23, 1938.

⁸⁹Liddell, Survey, p. 28.

⁹⁰Newfoundland Lumbermen's Association Constitution and By-Laws (n.d., n.p.). Two versions of this document are located in files 42 and 43 of the Hattenhauer Collection. By internal evidence, the version contained in file 43 can be seen to be a revision of the version contained in file 42. Significantly, an article stating that the NLA may join with other societies or federations which have the promotion of the interests of the workman and their object has been deleted from the second version of the document.

getting the government to enact a new logging act in 1938 providing for improved working conditions, and unlike the NTLC, the NLA could afford to hire a legal draftsman owing to its large membership and hence its large financial base. Each of the three other logging unions were able to pay full-time presidents as could the NLA and the St. John's LSPU.⁹¹ Furthermore, as in the previous year, the logging unions remained locked in a jurisdictional struggle which left little time or energy to consider affiliation with the NTLC.⁹² Despite frequent approaches from the NTLC executive the logging and longshoring unions remained on their own.

The leaders of the NTLC were disappointed with their failure to attract these large unions but they were even more disappointed with their failure to make substantial progress with their legislative program. The only plank in the platform implemented by the Commission during 1938-39 was a Shop Hours Act for Grand Falls.⁹³ The Commission's explanation was that they wanted to receive the Liddell report before making legislative changes. Since Liddell was not even scheduled to complete his research until September 1939 the NTLC's legislative program remained untouched.

⁹¹ Liddell, Survey, p. 46.

⁹² A History of the Newfoundland Lumbermen's Association from April 1936 to September 1956 (St. John's: Guardian Ltd., 1956), pp. 13-20. See also an untitled, type-written, highly biased account of the withdrawal of the WCPU written by J.J. Thompson, a copy of which is located in the Hattenhauer Collection, file number 52. See also Second Proceedings, p. 28; The Evening Telegram, September 30, 1938.

⁹³ Second Proceedings, p. 99; Liddell, Survey, p. 51.

Although most of the NTLC unions managed to consolidate their organizations and sign their first contracts during 1938-39, for the NTLC it was a year of little legislative or organizational success. It is not surprising, therefore, that when the delegates went to Corner Brook for the NTLC's third annual convention in the summer of 1939 they were in a mood to make changes.⁹⁴ The first change was to disband the executive committees that had performed so well during the organizing drive. They were replaced with district trades and labour councils (city centrals chartered by the NTLC) intended to increase communication between local unions and encourage broader participation in the Labour Movement than allowed by the small, centralized executive committees. A second change, made to eliminate the possibility of confusion with the district TLCs, was to change the name of the NTLC to the Newfoundland Federation of Labour.

Since the NTLC's legislative program was still under consideration by the Commission there was little to be gained by making changes there, although several additional planks were added in the light of the year's experience. Most important was a demand for a forty-three cent an hour minimum wage. In addition the delegates called for the government to legislate compulsory overtime rates, the establishment of a Department of Labour and a permanent board of conciliation, fair wage clauses in government contracts, and an eight-hour day in the mines.⁹⁵ The demands were yet another indication that the NFL differed from the more decentralized approach of the AFL and the TLC. The

⁹⁴ Interview with a reliable source.

⁹⁵ Liddell, Survey, p. 51.

demand for compulsory overtime is something that the international unions felt should be properly settled at the bargaining table rather than on the convention floor. The demand was also an indication the NTLC's new unions were meeting tough resistance at their bargaining tables. The most significant change made at the convention was not a change in program or structure, but a change in personnel. On the last day of the convention Jim Stowe president of the NFL's Nail, Foundry and Associate Workers' Union of St. John's defeated Duggan in the presidential election.⁹⁶ Stowe, a young, articulate and capable leader had come to the forefront in the organizing drive of 1937-38. He had the solid backing of the St. John's delegates who, as a group, were in a majority at the convention. Many of the St. John's trade unionists had been dissatisfied with Duggan's leadership from the start. They felt he was too cautious when it came to the NFL's organizing function, and distrusted his religiously based conservatism.⁹⁷ As a gesture of recognition for his work in founding the NTLC, however, the delegates made Duggan Honourary President of the Federation for life. To Duggan the honour was a hollow one. He had hoped to remain in the presidency for five years, possibly ten, in order to implement the Federation's legislative program and to fulfill his dream of elevating the condition of the entire Newfoundland working class to the levels of human dignity set forth in *Rerum Novarum*.⁹⁸ After his defeat Duggan continued to attend

⁹⁶ Walter Sparks, interview, June 1975.

⁹⁷ Walter Sparks, interview, June 1975.

⁹⁸ Duggan, "Summary," p. 2.

and even speak at subsequent NFL conventions, but he remained bitter until his death in 1970 over his removal from office.⁹⁹ With Duggan out of the presidency the Federation's offices were moved to St. John's where Stowe and F.A.F. Lush, the NFL's new secretary-treasurer, lived.

Despite the changes made at Corner Brook the delegates expected that the Federation would continue to pursue the same legislative, organizational and economic objectives developed during its first two years of existence. In a very short time the Federation executive had succeeded in establishing a large, stable organization that was no longer dependent on the dedication of one man or even a small group of men. Thus, the Federation would be expected to play an increasingly important role in Newfoundland society. Five short weeks after the Corner Brook convention, however, all that changed. On September 3, 1939, the day before Labour Day, Great Britain declared war on Germany and the NFL reacted patriotically. Organizing and lobbying government would have to take second place to the war effort. In the 1939 Labour Day parade the banners read "In Unity There is Strength" and "Solidarity Forever". The banner at the head of the 1938 Labour Day parade read "Rule Britannia".¹⁰⁰ For Newfoundland's young Labour Movement it represented the beginning of an entirely new period — a period characterized by new social and economic conditions and most of all by a greatly expanded role in labour relations by government.

⁹⁹ Duggan, "My Memoirs," p. 6.

¹⁰⁰ The Evening Telegram, September 4, 1939.

CHAPTER FIVE

ONE STEP FORWARD, ONE STEP BACK: 1939 - 1948

World War II interrupted the momentum which the Newfoundland Trade Union Movement had been building since the mid-thirties. In the five years proceeding the War twenty-four new unions were founded and union membership jumped almost 16,000 from 7,700 to 23,502.¹ Despite the advantage of virtual full employment during the six war years, however, between 1940 and 1945 only nine new unions were formed in Newfoundland and union membership increased by a comparatively modest 8,271. Significantly, less than ten percent of the wartime increase was attributed to the creation of new unions. The growth of the existing logging unions accounted for 4,400 new members, 1,200 were accounted for by the reorganization of the Wabana Mine Workers' Union and most of the remainder by increases in the workforce (and hence union membership) at the railway.² The figures for the NFL reflect a comparable stagnation. Membership fell from twenty-five unions and 7,203 members in 1939 to twenty-three unions and 7,120 members by the end of 1944.³ By the end of the War the NFL encompassed less than half

¹ See Appendix, Table 1.

² Calculated from raw data by the author.

³ See Appendix, Table 2.

the unions in the country and its share of the organized labour force dropped from 30.6 percent in 1939 to 23.8 percent in 1944.⁴ This was much different than the experience of the British, American and Canadian Labour Movements.

In Britain the War was a period of trade union expansion. British unions lost the right to strike but as compensation several trade union leaders and Labour MPs were appointed to key ministries in Winston Churchill's Coalition government.⁵ The leader of the Transport and General Workers Union, Ernest Bevin, became Minister of Labour ensuring that Labour's interests were protected. As the number of jobs increased along with increased wartime production, union membership grew. The totals rose from 6,053,000 in 1938 (including 4,669,000 affiliated to the TUC) to 7,803,000 in 1945 (6,671,000 affiliated).⁶

In the United States progress was slower. The extension of trade union organizations by the CIO into the mass production industries occurred before the United States entered the War. Furthermore, the American Labour Movement had already achieved its major legislative goal with the passage of the Wagner Act in 1935. With their right to organize and the obligation on employers to engage in collective bargaining enshrined in law, the AFL and the CIO agreed to back the American war effort.⁷ They agreed to the government's three point plan:

⁴See Appendix, Table 2.

⁵Pelling, British Trade Unionism, pp. 216-217.

⁶Pelling, British Trade Unionism, p. 222.

⁷Dullès, Labor, p. 333.

no strikes or lockouts for the duration of the War; peaceful settlement of all disputes and creation of a tri-partite board to handle all industrial relations conflicts that could not be settled otherwise. Working under the voluntary restraints, union membership during the war years grew by a relatively modest forty-one percent.⁸

In Canada union membership increased by almost 100 percent during the War.⁹ For the Canadian worker it was a boom period. During the Depression there was a shortage of jobs, now there was a shortage of labour; an ideal condition for the establishment of trade unions.¹⁰ Unlike unions in Newfoundland, Canadian unions maintained and even increased their pre-War levels of activity. Moreover, when the government appeared to adopt an anti-Labour attitude during the early years of World War II, Canadian unions responded with a record number of work stoppages, many of them in essential war industries. The strikes forced the government to act and in 1943 it introduced order-in-council P.C. 1003.¹¹ Like the Wagner Act in the United States, P.C. 1003 guaranteed compulsory collective bargaining, compulsory union recognition, and set up government machinery to investigate and correct

⁸ Historical Statistics of the U.S., p. 98.

⁹ Urquhart & Buckley, Statistics, p. 105.

¹⁰ Abella, "The Canadian Labour Movement," p. 20.

¹¹ Jack Williams, The Story of Unions in Canada (Toronto: J.M. Dent and Sons (Canada) Ltd., 1975), p. 169.

unfair labour practices.¹² If the Wagner Act was American Labour's Magna Carta; this, then, was Canada's.

As was the case in Canada, Newfoundland's enormous labour surplus was turned into a labour shortage by the War.¹³ In April 1939 84,659, or an incredible twenty-eight percent of the Newfoundland population, were being supported by government relief.¹⁴ By May of 1942 the number had shrunk to 7,945, all of whom were receiving long term assistance. In just three years the country's chronic employment problem had vanished. As many as 20,000 workers found employment in the construction of the American and Canadian military bases at Fort Pepperell, Argentia, Gander, Stephenville, Botwood and Goose Bay. Almost 5,000 more emigrated to the United States to work in factories and on dairy farms.¹⁵ By September 1941 2.7 percent of the population, including 8,000 of the 40,000 Newfoundland men between the ages of twenty and forty, had volunteered for military service. Suddenly labour was in short supply and wages went up.

¹² Jamieson, Trouble, p. 300.

¹³ "Economic Report for the Guidance of the National Convention" (Mimeograph, n.d., Section IV. Located in the Provincial Archives, St. John's, Newfoundland.

¹⁴ The Evening Telegram, May 15, 1939.

¹⁵ Report of the Labour Relations Officer for the Period June 1st, 1942 to February 8th, 1944 (St. John's: Robinson and Company, 1944), p. 13; Letter from A.J. Walsh to Wilfred Woods, October 6, 1943 (located at the Provincial Archives, St. John's, Newfoundland); The Evening Telegram, March 31, 1943.

In the pulp and paper industry wages rose sixty percent from 1939 to 1945.¹⁶ In the mining industry they went up fifty percent and in the St. John's construction trades and on the docks they rose by seventy percent. In addition workers who were underemployed before the War were now working forty to sixty hours a week and even more. Unfortunately, much of the increased income was lost due to inflation (53.4 percent from 1939 to 1945 using the conservative estimate of the government's cost of living index) but through full employment the country prospered. Why then, did the Newfoundland Trade Union Movement and in particular the NFL fail to prosper?

Part of the answer is found in the patriotic attitude of the NFL towards the War. The NFL was the primary catalyst for trade union organization in Newfoundland; however, immediately after the War was declared its leaders announced they would cooperate fully in the war effort.¹⁷ Their reaction was typical of most Newfoundlanders. As a correspondent for the *Financial Times* put it:

A patriotic fever characterizes every aspect of Newfoundland's War effort. In terms of its small population and limited resources it is a giant among nations. In manpower, materials and money it represents an all out effort.¹⁸

Although the leaders of the NFL and the logging unions stopped short of committing themselves to a no-strike policy, they reduced their organizational

¹⁶"Economic Report for the National Convention,"
Section IV.

¹⁷The Evening Telegram, September 4, 1939.

¹⁸The Financial Post, cited in The Evening Telegram,
September 27, 1941.

activity feeling that a continuation of the organizing drives of the late 1930s could hurt the war effort.¹⁹ They were content to try and protect Labour's interests by accepting appointments to government committees — among them the New Industries Board, the War Loans Committee, the Unemployment Assistance Committee, the Advisory Committee to the Cabinet on Demobilization and Economic Readjustment, and the various patriotic associations.²⁰ Since labour leaders had not been used to being included on government committees this seemed like a big step forward. The committees were simply advisory bodies, however, and it was not power sharing as was the case in Britain. The real power still rested with the Commission of Government whose approach to labour relations was embodied in the 1941 Avoidance of Strikes and Lockouts Regulations.²¹ The Regulations, modelled on the British Order 1305, banned strikes and lockouts in favour of compulsory arbitration.

For the first two years of the War the Commission had left collective bargaining to the unions and the employers, but although the NFL and the logging unions had become less militant other unions had not. In the spring of 1941, before the Regulations

¹⁹ The Federator, Souvenir Edition, 51; Walter Sparks, interview, July 1975; Report of the Labour Relations Officer, p. 9.

²⁰ Commission of Government Papers, file P28, Box S2-2-3, (located in the Provincial Archives, St. John's, Newfoundland); The Evening Telegram, May 30, 1942; Report of the Proceedings of the Fourth Annual Convention of the Newfoundland Federation of Labour (St. John's: Long Brothers, 1940), p. 22.

²¹ Report of the Labour Relations Officer, p. 2.

came into effect, there were a series of strikes by the LSPU at the St. John's waterfront and by the St. Lawrence miners' union at the flourspar mine in St. Lawrence.²²

The first union to test the Regulations was the Buchans Workmen's Protective Union. The BWPU went on strike early in August 1941, barely a month after the Regulations were declared. The union demanded a ten cent an hour wage increase, control of the cost of diving, recognition of the union as sole bargaining agent at the mine, and improvements in overtime pay and shift premiums.²³ When news of the strike reached St. John's the Commission asked the two sides to voluntarily accept binding arbitration.²⁴ The company agreed but the union did not, chiefly because the Commission stipulated the miners would have to return to work before an arbitration tribunal would be appointed.

The miners declared they would remain off the job, not only until the tribunal was appointed, but until it arrived in Buchans to begin deliberations.²⁵ The Commission regarded the union's response as a provocation, and countered by sending seventy-nine members of the Newfoundland Constabulary to the town "to help keep order" and "protect those wanting to return to work," even though there had been no reported

²² The Evening Telegram, November 10, 1941.

²³ The Evening Telegram, August 8, 1941.

²⁴ The Evening Telegram, August 8, 1941.

²⁵ The Evening Telegram, August 8, 1941.

instances of either disorder or coercion.²⁶ In addition, summonses were served on thirteen miners, including all ten members of the union executive, for breach of the Regulations. Still, the men remained off the job. Two days later, on August 11, Sir Wilfred Woods, the Commissioner of Public Utilities (the department responsible for Labour) and A.J. Walsh, the Assistant Secretary of Justice, travelled to Buchans to try personal persuasion.²⁷

They met first with the union executive and then addressed a general membership meeting of the union. They asked the 600 miners to return to work and explained the seriousness of their actions. The two men were received politely but silently. When Woods finished speaking he invited the miners to put questions to him. None was asked. The union then held a private meeting and one hour later delivered a letter to Woods informing him they had unanimously decided not to return to work. Finally the government gave in. They appointed the tribunal and on August 14, when the miners were informed the tribunal was on its way to Buchans, they returned to work.²⁸ One month later, Sir Brian Dunfield, the supreme court judge appointed to chair the tribunal, submitted his report; it became the model upon which all subsequent wartime settlements were based.²⁹

²⁶ Arthur Fox, The Newfoundland Constabulary (St. John's: Robinson and Company, 1944), p. 2.

²⁷ The Evening Telegram, August 12, 1941.

²⁸ The Evening Telegram, August 12, 1941.

²⁹ The Evening Telegram, December 11, 1941.

Dunfield called for an eight and a half cent an hour increase in wages, time and a half for overtime and Sundays, and directed that a cost of living adjustment clause, similar to the one enacted in Canada under order-in-council 7440, be included in the contract.³⁰ He also required the company to recognize the BWPU and negotiate with it as the sole bargaining agent at the mine. Thus two important principles were established for the duration of the War. The first was that employers would have to bargain with unions that represented a clear majority of their employees and the second was that wartime inflation would not be allowed to erode real wages. The settlement was another reason for the lack of militance by the unions during the War. They were pleased by this and subsequent settlements by government tribunals, so much so that in 1943 the NPASOE submitted a resolution to the Federation's annual convention asking that government retain the Regulations once the War was over. The NPASOE had won a settlement under the Regulations it felt it could not have won on its own.³¹

An additional guarantee of peaceful labour relations was the special mechanism set up by the government to deal with the country's logging unions. In the summer of 1940 the four unions joined Bowaters and the Anglo-Newfoundland Development Company to form the Woods Labour Board — a body which functioned as a permanent forum for the negotiation

³⁰ The Evening Telegram, September 13, 14, 1941. These two editions contain a verbatim account of the Dunfield Report.

³¹ Report of the Proceedings of the Seventh Annual Convention of the Newfoundland Federation of Labour (St. John's: Long Brothers, 1943), p. 28.

of collective agreements and the settlement of grievances and jurisdictional disputes.³²

Devices like the Woods Labour Board and the Strikes and Lockouts tribunals fulfilled, in practical terms at least, two of the Federation's most important goals — legal protection for trade union organization and compulsory collective bargaining. The Commission made it clear, however, that these were temporary measures.³³ As early as 1943 legislative draftsmen were drawing up new regulations reaffirming the Commission's peacetime commitment to the proposition that governments should not become involved in labour disputes unless they are asked to intervene by both interested parties. The approach was a reflection of British practice and was embodied in a recommendation in the Liddell report for the establishment of conciliation boards.³⁴ Liddell had finally submitted his report on October 17, 1939 and the recommendation for conciliation boards was one of the few concrete suggestions he had made. Considering the NFL had deferred many of its requests for legislative reform in anticipation of the report, the final document was disappointing indeed.³⁵ It was a rambling, 142 page review of Newfoundland's economic circumstances, existing collective agreements, and trade

³² Raymond Gushue, "The Newfoundland Woods Labour Board" (address to the St. John's Rotary Club, May 19, 1955; mimeographed).

³³ Report of the Labour Relations Officer, p. 10; Cohen, Royal Commission, p. 59.

³⁴ Liddell, Survey, p. 141.

³⁵ Secretary of State for Dominion Affairs, Despatch No. 490, October 17, 1939, cited in an unsigned despatch from the Commission of Government in Newfoundland to H.M. Tait, Esq. CMG (Dominions Office, n.d.), p. 1; see also Fourth Proceedings.

union policy, liberally laced with Imperial condescension. The Commission had wanted Liddell to formulate a coherent industrial relations policy for Newfoundland but instead they received five vaguely worded and largely unconnected recommendations. Liddell advised that the Trade Union Act of 1910 be revised to include sections on illegal strikes and civil service unions. He recommended that a section of one government department be made responsible for dealing exclusively with labour relations and that the scope of the Workmen's Compensation Act be broadened. He also suggested that if the government found it necessary to set minimum wages it be done on an industry basis. Finally he recommended the creation of conciliation boards.³⁶

Significantly, the models used by Liddell for these new laws were British but he failed to suggest how they could be adapted to Newfoundland. Particularly galling to the Federation was the fact Liddell dismissed their request for legislation modelled on the Wagner Act as "entirely unbalanced" and "foreign to the spirit of British legislation in connection with labour affairs."³⁷

Even though the government was disappointed with the quality of Liddell's report they did agree with Liddell's approach. The Commission rejected the Federation's North American approach to labour relations just as it ignored most of the planks in the NFL's legislative program. At their annual conventions during the War, the Federation asked for price controls, equal pay for men and women,

³⁶ Liddell, Survey, pp. 138-142.

³⁷ Liddell, Survey, p. 108.

increased welfare payments, and additional mines inspectors as well as restating the planks in its earlier legislative platform. Two demands — a Compulsory Education Act and the creation of a labour relations office — were fulfilled, although not necessarily as a result of pressure from the Federation.³⁸ But requests for the eight-hour day, the forty-hour week, union rates of pay on government contracts, state insurance for sickness and disability, and old age pensions were all rejected on the grounds they were items more appropriate to the collective bargaining process or too expensive for the public purse.³⁹ The most glaring example of the Federation's weakness was the Commission's policy on "prevailing rates of pay." Fearful of the inflationary impact a sudden wartime construction boom might have on the economy, the Commission asked the American government to hold the wages paid to their Newfoundland employees down to prevailing local rates.⁴⁰ The NFL protested that wages should be established by the law of supply and demand, but their protests were ignored. Gradually the leaders of the Federation began to realize the cost workers were paying to support the war effort was too high and as the end of the War came in sight there was a revival of the Federation's militant pre-War spirit.

In order to re-establish the Federation's credibility the delegates to the 1944 convention decided to mount an organizing drive. The decision forced the delegates to face an old problem — lack

³⁸ Report of the Labour Relations Officer, p. 1.

³⁹ Fourth Proceedings, pp. 17-22.

⁴⁰ Cohen, Royal Commission, p. 57.

of money. Per capita fees had not increased since the Federation was founded. On a budget often less than \$2000 per year the NFL had not been able to hire full-time employees to give the organization a degree of administrative continuity. They continued to rely on elected volunteers and as a result the well-being of the Federation was directly related to the vigor and competence of the individuals on its executive. The NFL's wartime presidents, Charlie Ballam and Harry Oxford (both members of the Corner Brook mill unions), were competent individuals but their performances as president were undistinguished. Although the delegates to the 1944 convention realized they had an administrative problem, they were not willing to commit their unions to a dues increase to solve it. Instead, they decided to turn to the AFL for help and wrote to the AFL asking for funds to hire a full-time organizer.⁴¹ The AFL agreed and sent two cheques to the NFL to start the project. Before the NFL could cash the cheques, however, the president of the AFL, William Green (Gompers had died in 1924), stepped in. He demanded that every new union formed during the drive would have to be either a directly chartered affiliate of the AFL or join an international affiliate of the AFL.⁴² But even though most of the NFL executive belonged to AFL unions they were not willing to relinquish sovereignty of the NFL as a national labour central to a foreign organization. They rejected Green's proposal and returned the money.

⁴¹ Seventh Proceedings, pp. 40-41.

⁴² Cyril Strong, "Answers to Questions" (Mimeographed copy of a six-page, typewritten manuscript, n.d.), p. 2. Copy in the possession of the author.

Still in Newfoundland, as in most Allied countries, the mood was right for organizing. The status of every national labour movement had risen during the War as a result of Labour's cooperation with the war effort.⁴³ The executive decided to proceed on their own and met with some success. By the opening of the 1945 convention, charters had been granted to three new national unions and two new international locals founded by the executive.⁴⁴

The new unions were a sign of progress but for the delegates to the 1945 convention it was not enough. At last they decided to increase their financial support to the Federation, first by raising the per capita dues from twenty-eight to thirty cents a year, and secondly by passing a special assessment to establish a permanent office.⁴⁵ Out of the special assessment the Federation hired a full-time organizer, a fiery young trade unionist from St. John's named Harold Horwood. Although only twenty-one years of age, Horwood already had a significant organizing achievement to his credit.⁴⁶ After spending three years as a rank and file member of the LSPU he organized

⁴³ Dulles, Labor, p. 346; H.A. Logan, Trade Unions in Canada (Toronto: The Macmillan Company of Canada Ltd., 1948), p. 550; Pelling, British Trade Unionism, p. 221.

⁴⁴ Report of the Proceedings of the Ninth Annual Convention of the Newfoundland Federation of Labour (Grand Falls: Robinson and Co., Ltd., 1945), p. 14.

⁴⁵ Ninth Proceedings, p. 15.

⁴⁶ The Daily News, March 5, 1946; Harold Horwood, interview, July 1975. Mr. Horwood is now known primarily for his successful writing career and his role in the Confederation campaign of 1946-1949. During the mid-1940s, however, he was best known as a prominent trade union leader and founder of the St. John's Labourers' and General Workers' Protective Union.

a union of construction labourers in St. John's. After only six months the union had succeeded in negotiating a 37.5 percent wage increase and in enrolling over 1000 members, making it the largest union in the NFL.⁴⁷

Horwood was an idealist -- a young man who had been converted to socialism by the BRC's Irving Fogwill and he went at his organizing duties with unrestrained enthusiasm and energy. In four months he organized garage mechanics, brewery workers, garment workers, paint manufacturing workers in St. John's; fish plant workers at Burin; and reorganized a labourers' union at the Argentia naval base. In the course of his organizing, however, Horwood's abrasive personality drew some adverse publicity towards the Federation. Horwood and Greg Power, the president of the labourers' union at Argentia, were escorted off the naval base at gunpoint for having the temerity to try and organize the workers.⁴⁸ Still mindful of maintaining a "respectable" public image, the Federation executive became disenchanted with Horwood. He in turn came to regard them as too conservative and too tied to the craft unionism of the AFL. On March 29, 1947 Horwood was suspended by the executive and once again organizing became the responsibility of the Federation's executive and the district labour councils.⁴⁹

Despite the firing, by 1947 NFL membership stood at an all time high of 13,700 or 35.5 percent of the organized labour force.⁵⁰

⁴⁷The Evening Telegram, October 19, 21, 1946; Harold Horwood, interview, July 1975:

⁴⁸Harold Horwood, interview, July 1975; Strong, "Answers to Questions," p. 4; Report of the Proceedings of the Eleventh Annual Convention of the Newfoundland Federation of Labour (n.p., n.d.), p. 34.

⁴⁹Eleventh Proceedings, p. 34.

⁵⁰See Appendix, Table 2.

Just as important, the NFL now represented fifty of the country's seventy-eight unions and once again could act with the firm assurance that it spoke for the majority of Newfoundland's labour unions.⁵¹

Nevertheless, the NFL's goal of complete trade union unity was still far off. The woods unions, which accounted for between 10,000 and 16,000 workers, continued to reject the NFL's frequent invitations for affiliation. Moreover, two new problems appeared.

When Horwood was the NFL's organizer, he had organized the St. John's construction unions into a Building Crafts Council [BCC].⁵² The Council consisted of electricians, labourers, plumbers and pipe-fitters, painters, tin and sheet metal workers, and brick layers and masons — a total of 2,500 workers.⁵³ Shortly before the NFL 1947 convention all these unions, with the exception of the electricians, withdrew from the Federation. Since this coincided so closely with Horwood's firing by the Federation, the suspicion arises it was an act of retaliation, but statements made by the principals involved indicated the reason was financial rather than personal.⁵⁴ In order to enforce a union shop in an industry where the work was spread over an entire city, the Council had to hire a full-time business agent to police the various construction sites. This cost \$1000 a year and the BCC claimed

⁵¹ See Appendix, Table 2.

⁵² The Evening Telegram, March 28, 1947.

⁵³ The Evening Telegram, March 28, 1947.

⁵⁴ Harold Horwood, interview, July 1975; The Evening Telegram, August 23, 1947, January 5, 1949; Report of the Proceedings of the Twelfth Annual Convention of the Newfoundland Federation of Labour (n.p., n.d.), p. 7.

the unions could not afford to pay NFL affiliation fees as well. Whatever the reasons, the withdrawal of the construction unions nullified the membership gains made during the 1946-47 organizing year and the Federation's proportional share of the workforce fell from 35.5 percent to 31.4 percent.⁵⁵ The second blow to NFL dominance occurred in 1948.

By this time it was becoming increasingly possible that Newfoundland would soon be joining the Canadian Confederation and inevitably the rivalry between Canada's two competing labour federations, the CIO-backed Canadian Congress of Labour [CCL] and the AFL-backed TLC,⁵⁶ spilled over into Newfoundland. Up to 1947 only the TLC had shown interest in Newfoundland. Besides the early letters between Duggan and TLC president P.M. Draper, the two labour bodies had from time to time exchanged fraternal delegates to their annual convention and, of course, both had ties to the AFL.⁵⁶ On the other hand, the only CIO penetration into Newfoundland to this point was the creation of three small locals of the American Communications Association established in connection with the operation of the trans-Atlantic communications cable.⁵⁷ In September 1947, however, the CCL's Atlantic regional director, Donald McDonald, came to Newfoundland to assess the potential for CCL expansion. He decided the best strategy was to have CCL

⁵⁵ See Appendix, Table 2.

⁵⁶ Report of the Proceedings of the Sixty-Third Annual Convention of the Canadian Trades and Labour Congress 1949 (n.p., n.d.), p. 141.

⁵⁷ Letter from Donald McDonald to Pat Conroy, September 29, 1947. Located in the National Archives, Ottawa.

affiliates try and win over existing Newfoundland unions rather than organize unorganized workers.⁵⁸ On January 22 the Wabana Mine Workers' Union voted 1,341 to 50 to join the United Steel Workers of America [USWA].⁵⁹ In August the Gander General Workers' Union also joined the Steelworkers and as a result the NFL lost another 3000 members.

From 1944 to 1948 the NFL recorded a net gain of only 3,051 members.⁶⁰ On the other hand, the level of trade union organization in Newfoundland as a whole was outstanding. In the ten years after the Federation was founded in 1937 trade union membership increased from 19,156 to 42,848.⁶¹ Of the total 23,700 member increase, 6,700 were a result of expansion in the woods labour force and therefore membership increases in the logging unions; 6,000 more organized unions on their own initiative; and 10,000 were organized as a result of organizing drives by the NFL.⁶² On a per capita basis, Newfoundland had twice as many organized workers as Canada.⁶³ Donald McDonald was just one of many foreign labour leaders who were amazed at their first encounter with the Newfoundland Labour Movement. In 1947 McDonald wrote:

In fact it was my first impression that St. John's with a population of 62,000 was perhaps the most

⁵⁸ McDonald to Conroy, September 29, 1947.

⁵⁹ The Evening Telegram, January 22, 1948.

⁶⁰ See Appendix, Table 2.

⁶¹ See Appendix, Table 1.

⁶² Calculated from raw data by author.

⁶³ See Appendix, Table 4.

highly organized city that I have ever visited. Practically every worker encountered was a member of the forty-one trade unions in the city.... The same holds true for Grand Falls, Corner Brook, Bell Island and Deer Lake.⁶⁴

It was because McDonald saw there were so few groups of workers left to organize that he concluded the best prospect for CCL penetration into Newfoundland was to woo existing unions into affiliates of the CCL-CIO.

The Federation could take much of the credit for the high level of organization but its problem was that it could not hold its membership. Partly this was due to its administrative and financial problems. The financial base of the Federation was still too small to support a full-time staff. The NFL was a volunteer organization carried on by men who attended to Federation business after coming home from their regular jobs or on weekends. Even though they worked tremendously hard it was not possible to maintain contact with all the Federation's member unions. As a result, unions often decided to withdraw from the organization. But despite its shortcomings, the NFL could look back at a decade of achievement too. Besides its organizing successes its very presence as a national trade union centre had lent stability and permanence to many Newfoundland trade unions. Furthermore, in the absence of an elected system of national government, the Federation's annual conventions had become the one national forum where legislative reform could be debated in public. That era was drawing to a close, however. Newfoundlanders had voted by a slim majority to become a province of Canada and that meant massive changes in the legal and political context

⁶⁴ McDonald to Conroy, September 29, 1947.

in the Federation would have to operate. Inevitably, the Federation had to change too.

CHAPTER SIX
TRIUMPH OF THE INTERNATIONALS

In theory, there were four options open to the NFL after Confederation. It could become a provincial federation of the TLC; it could become a provincial federation of the CCL; it could become a directly-chartered regional central of the AFL; or it could attempt to remain independent like the Canadian and Catholic Confederation of Trade Unions in Quebec. Of the four options only the first received serious consideration. Until the results of the final referendum on Confederation were completed the question of the Federation's future was not open for debate. The anti-Confederate faction within the NFL was strong and an attempt to discuss affiliation with the TLC or the CCL would have been seen as a lever to bring about union with Canada through the back door.¹ On July 22, 1948, however, the matter was finally settled in favour of Confederation. Because the NFL's annual convention occurred just one month later, the executive did not have time to prepare a recommendation for the delegates on the Federation's future direction. However, by the time the convention was over there was little doubt about what the final decision would be.

In a speech on opening day, Phonse Duggan told the delegates the NFL and the TLC were natural partners, although he stopped

¹Irving Fogwill, interview, June 1975.

short of recommending affiliation.² J.W. Buckley, the secretary of the TLC, and Philip Cutler, the Canadian regional director of the AFL, showed no such reticence. Both men agreed that if Newfoundland was going to be a province of Canada it was natural that AFL unions should follow the same practice followed in the rest of Canada and affiliate with a provincial federation of the TLC. In his speech to the convention Buckley emphasized Canada's close links with Britain, her record of service in two world wars and the similarities in race, tradition and culture between Canada and Newfoundland.³ In passing, he noted Canada's wealth and then shifted his focus to the Canadian Labour Movement. The TLC, he explained, was the Canadian trade union centre for the AFL. It had its own organizing staff, issued charters to federal unions but in no way interfered with the agreements negotiated by its affiliates. In the legislative field it spoke for its members in Ottawa but in the provincial field its chartered provincial centrals dealt with the provincial governments. He pointed to national workmen's compensation laws, old age pensions, unemployment insurance, and the National Labour Code as evidence of the TLC's success in lobbying the federal government.

Later in the convention, Cutler reinforced Buckley's comments and in fact took them one step further.⁴ Cutler confirmed that the AFL was not interested in chartering the NFL as a regional labour central. He told the delegates the AFL recognized the sovereignty

²Twelfth Proceedings, p. 8.

³Twelfth Proceedings, pp. 13-18.

⁴Twelfth Proceedings, pp. 61-67.

of the TLC in Canada. He also denounced the CIO (and by implication the CCL) calling it a dual organization bent on splitting the Labour Movement. This second point struck a particularly responsive chord.⁵ Given the recent defections of the Wabana Mine Workers' Union and the Gander General Workers' Union, the Federation was fearful of still more losses. But since the final terms of Confederation had still not been negotiated and because the anti-Confederate forces were preparing an appeal to the British government to block Confederation, the convention stopped short of voting for a merger with the TLC. Even so, the meeting clarified the future direction of the NFL considerably. The possibilities of independence, affiliation with the AFL or affiliation with the CCL quickly faded into the background. Absorption by the TLC was the most obvious and most logical option.⁶ The following year, at the 1949 convention, with Confederation an accomplished fact, the delegates accepted a recommendation by the executive to merge with the TLC, and so, after thirteen years the NFL's role as a national labour central had come to an end.⁷

As a provincial arm of a national labour central the NFL gave up its right to charter trade unions, and its authority was limited:

⁵ Strong, "Answers to Questions," p. 2.

⁶ Twelfth Proceedings, entire.

⁷ Twelfth Proceedings, p. 51; The Evening Telegram, August 13, 1949.

To seek and encourage legislation in the interests of organized labour in Newfoundland and to assist as far as possible in the work of organizing the unorganized throughout the province.⁸

As part of the merger the NFL agreed to encourage its independently-chartered unions to affiliate with their appropriate AFL internationals but not without a significant concession to the Federation's historic role as a charter granting central. If the independents chose not to join AFL unions they would still be allowed to retain their membership in the Federation.⁹ Furthermore, the NFL was allowed to accept unions belonging to the CCL-CIO for membership provided they had been members of the NFL previous to 1949. The latter concession was negotiated in order to leave the door open for the Bell Island miners and the Gander General Workers' Union. Even before such formal changes had been negotiated, however, the Federation had begun to change considerably.

After the 1948 convention the Federation reached an agreement with the AFL on organizing.¹⁰ Now that the NFL's sovereignty as a national labour central was no longer an issue, the stipulation that all unions organized would become either direct affiliates of the AFL or affiliates of AFL unions was acceptable to the Federation. In response to the NFL's request for organizational help the AFL appointed NFL secretary Cyril Strong as their full-time representative in

⁸ Report of the Proceedings of the Thirteenth Annual Convention of the Newfoundland Federation of Labour (n.p., n.d.), p. 43.

⁹ Strong, "Answers to Questions," p. 2.

¹⁰ The Daily News, September 14, 1948.

unions, including the 800-member Buchans Workmen's Protective and the 400-member Fishermens' Protective Union of Burin East had applied for charters from either the AFL or one of its affiliates.¹⁶ More important from the Federation's point of view was the return of some of the unions which had defected over the years. The St. Lawrence Workers' Protective Union, the Painters' Protective Association, and the 2000-member St. John's Labourers' and General Workers' Protective Union all re-entered the NFL via their affiliation with the AFL or one of its affiliates.¹⁷ In addition, new locals with international affiliations were organized among the St. John's plasterers, employees of the Avalon Telephone Company, the United Towns Electric Company, the Newfoundland Light and Power Company and shop workers on Bell Island. In all, eight locals and 3500 workers joined the NFL between the 1948 and 1949 conventions — a thirty-five percent increase in membership.¹⁸

By the start of the 1949 convention most NFL unions were affiliated to AFL internationals or directly to the AFL. Cutler and Buckley had seized the initiative and Donald McDonald and the CCL could do little but stand helplessly by and watch as the conversion of the NFL into an arm of the TLC was completed.¹⁹ The change was solidified by the election of a new president at the 1949 convention, Frank Chafe.

¹⁶ Thirteenth Proceedings, p. 18.

¹⁷ Thirteenth Proceedings, p. 18.

¹⁸ See Appendix, Table 2.

¹⁹ Letter from Donald McDonald to Pat Conroy, September 4, 1951. Located at the National Archives, Ottawa.

Newfoundland.¹¹ Then in January 1949 Philip Cutler returned to initiate an intensive AFL organizing campaign.¹² First he addressed a small but enthusiastic group of union leaders at the Pitts Memorial Hall at a meeting sponsored by the St. John's District Trades and Labour Council. He enlisted their support in organizing meetings with groups prepared "to go International". The SJDTLC agreed to maintain a weekly labour page in *The Daily News* and a column in *The Evening Telegram*. Similar efforts were mounted in Buchans, Grand Falls and Corner Brook. Meanwhile Cutler and Strong travelled the country selling the AFL's brand of unionism packaged in a neat five point program.¹³

The AFL offered the services of an organizer (which of course included expertise in collective bargaining), the use of the AFL's research department in Washington, a monthly magazine published by the AFL sent to every member, a strike fund, and a standard book-keeping system. In the case of several of the AFL's international unions, Cutler could also add a variety of life insurance and mortuary benefit schemes.¹⁴ Response by Newfoundland workers, with the exception of the longshore and logging unions, was usually positive. On January 15, 1949 the NPASOE voted to join the 250,000 member Retail Clerks International Association.¹⁵ By August 1949 eleven more independent NFL

¹¹ Thirteenth Proceedings, p. 19.

¹² The Evening Telegram, January 8, 1949.

¹³ [C.W. Strong], "What the Worker Pays For" (mimeographed single sheet, April 28, 1956). Copy in possession of the author.

¹⁴ The Evening Telegram, January 15, 1949.

¹⁵ The Evening Telegram, January 15, 1949.

of the BRC. Chafe chaired the Federation's Legislative Committee and piloted through the convention the many constitutional changes required by affiliation to the TLC. He was one of the most articulate, best educated members of the Federation and he was also one of the strongest advocates of AFL-style "business unionism".²⁰

Like Samuel Gompers, Chafe believed that the interests of the workers could best be served by developing a working relationship between Labour and Capital.²¹ Many previous leaders of the NFL advocated the same philosophy, but where Chafe differed was in his cold, unsentimental style. He viewed labour relations as a business deal in which both sides had obligations to fulfill and rights which must be respected. The immediate goal for the Newfoundland Labour Movement, as Chafe saw it, was for unions to upgrade their organizations to a level of order and efficiency worthy of the respect of employers, government and the public. Once that was accomplished, Labour could legitimately (and more importantly, successfully) claim a larger share of the economic pie. Direct political participation received a low priority in Chafe's philosophy since it had the potential to create divisions within the Labour Movement and conflict with the political party in power. Finally, Chafe felt the Labour Movement in Newfoundland needed more leaders who

²⁰ Thirteenth Proceedings, p. 73.

²¹ Frank Chafe, interview, September 1975. Mr. Chafe was the president of the NFL for five years during the 1950s. He was the representative of the TLC and later the CLC in Newfoundland from 1950 to 1960 and later went on to become the CLC's Director of Public Services Unions.

were capable of handling the complexities of modern trade unionism and had the ability to create a favourable impression on the public — leaders like himself.

The AFL campaign bore good results for the AFL and the NFL.²² In 1947 international locals accounted for only 4,301 workers, or ten percent of the organized labour force in Newfoundland. By the end of 1949 the international's share was 15,875 workers or thirty-eight percent. By 1956 21,482 workers, or fifty-two percent, were members of international locals, most of them affiliated with the AFL. Growth for the AFL internationals automatically meant growth for the NFL.

As stated earlier, unions such as the St. Lawrence Workers' Protective Union, the St. John's Labourers' Union, and several of the St. John's construction unions returned to the NFL via their newly-adopted internationals. Sometimes this was a result of the influence exercised by an international's business agent who would advise a local to join the NFL. In other cases some international union constitutions contained a clause which made membership in national and regional centrals compulsory.²³ As a result, the balance between national and international unions in the NFL shifted drastically.²⁴ Where there were twenty-five national and twenty-two international locals in 1948, there were five national and forty-four international

²² See Appendix, Tables 1. and 2.

²³ One-page circular letter from Chafe to all Newfoundland unions, January 1957. Copy in the possession of the author.

²⁴ See Appendix, Table 2.

locals in 1950. Total membership jumped from 10,171 members, or 25.1 percent of the organized labour force, in 1948 to 19,498, or fifty percent in 1950. By the mid-1950s the NFL represented the majority of Newfoundland's trade union members as well as a majority of its trade unions. In 1956 membership stood at 23,489 or 56.5 percent of the organized labour force. After struggling for so long to make the NFL the undisputed leader of the Newfoundland trade union movement, one might expect peak enthusiasm within the NFL when it finally happened. That was not the case. (As the NFL moved into the mid-1950s interest in the organization declined. Where once there was spirited competition for the NFL's executive positions, many of the positions began to go by acclamation.²⁵ Often the officers who were elected failed to complete their terms, resigning for 'personal reasons'. Increasingly the Federation's leadership, Chafe in particular, complained publicly that the rank and file were apathetic towards the NFL and even their own unions.²⁶

As was often the case, the health of the NFL reflected the health of the Newfoundland Labour Movement in general. After the slow but steady progress made since 1937, the level of trade union organization in Newfoundland began to fall.²⁷ From a high of 41,650 in 1949, the figures dropped to 38,440 in 1952 before recovering to 41,534 in 1956. Newfoundland often reacted to general North American

²⁵ Proceedings, 1937-1960 inclusive.

²⁶ "Chafe to Newfoundland Unions," January 1957.

²⁷ See Appendix, Table 4.

developments in the Trade Union Movement and at the time the organizing climate in Canada and the United States was cooling. The fifties was a period of strong economic growth and, as was the situation in the twenties, prosperity created a situation in which workers felt less urgently the need to be organized. Several strikes by the American Labour Movement dissipated much of the good will it had built up during the War. In Canada the CCL and the TLC suffered a loss of prestige owing to the well-publicized presence of several Communist-dominated unions in their ranks.²⁸

Although the absolute number of trade union members continued to rise in Canada and the United States, membership as a percentage of the labour force between 1949 and 1956 increased only slightly (ten percent in Canada and 1.8 percent in the USA).²⁹ In Newfoundland the absolute number remained almost the same, but membership as a percentage of the labour force declined by 14.8 percent.³⁰ Since Newfoundland did not share many of the problems which had tempered enthusiasm for trade unionism in Canada and the United States the decline in the Newfoundland figures must be attributed to local factors — among them the changed legislative and political environment brought about by Confederation.

After fifteen years of Commission of Government, Newfoundland returned to electoral politics. Since its founding in 1937

²⁸ Abella, Nationalism, Communism, p. 221.

²⁹ Urquhart & Buckley, Historical Statistics, p. 105; Historical Statistics of the United States, p. 97.

³⁰ See Appendix, Table 4.

the NFL had operated in a political environment unique among Western labour centrals. In Newfoundland the question was not whether Labour should be involved in politics; it was whether there should be electoral politics at all. Since there were no elections the NFL had never been forced to debate its approach to political participation. As World War II drew to a close, however, a group of trade union leaders from St. John's forced the Federation to consider the question. Inspired by the victory of the British Labour Party in the general election of 1945, representatives of all the NFL trade unions in St. John's held a meeting.³¹ It was organized by Jim Ryall (Carmen), Irving Fogwill (BRC), Cyril Strong (Hotel and Restaurant Workers), and Bill Gillies (NPASOE).³² All four looked with envy upon the integral relationship between the Labour Party and the TUC. They felt the progress of the Trade Union Movement in Newfoundland could be advanced if Labour had a similar political ally. For the moment that possibility appeared remote, but in anticipation of the return of electoral politics, Ryall and the others decided Labour should test its support by contesting the municipal elections in St. John's. Those elections were scheduled for November 1945 and the meeting agreed to form the St. John's District Labour Party [STDLP].

The SJDLP's debt to the British Labour Party was reflected in its platform.³³ It called for such social democratic reforms as the

³¹The Evening Telegram, October 12, 1945.

³²Irving Fogwill, interview, June 1975; Harold Horwood, interview, July 1975; Cyril Strong, interview, April 1974.

³³The Evening Telegram, November 2, 1945.

creation of a municipal mortgage bank, a slum clearance program, municipal control of public utilities, enforcement of a fair labour clause in municipal contracts, a master plan for controlled development within the city, a new home construction program, the acquisition of absentee landlord leases, and the construction of a municipal stadium. The party selected Gillies, Bill Frampton of the Carpenters' Union and the young president of the newly-formed local of the IBEW in St. John's, Joe Ashley, as its candidates.³⁴ For mayor, they decided to support Jim Gibbs, the lawyer for the LSPU and the son of former mayor M.P. Gibbs.

The results, while not overwhelming, were sufficiently encouraging to convince the party to continue. In a field of sixteen candidates, the SJDLP finished seventh, ninth and eleventh.³⁵ Frampton missed the sixth and last seat by less than 300 votes. In the mayoralty race Gibbs finished a respectable second in a three-man contest.

The next opportunity to test public reaction was not long in coming. The elections for the National Convention, the body set up by the British government to make recommendations on possible future forms of government for Newfoundland, were scheduled for June 21, 1946. The SJDLP decided to contest the eight seats set aside for St. John's.³⁶ Again the party's founders had reason to be pleased. Two of their candidates, Frank Fogwill of the Railway Carmen and Gordon Higgins,

³⁴ The Evening Telegram, November 2, 1945; Harold Horwood, interview, July 1975.

³⁵ The Evening Telegram, November 14, 1945.

³⁶ The Evening Telegram, May 29, 1946; Strong, interview, April 1974.

the lawyer for the Newfoundland Seamen's Association, were elected.³⁷ Even more promising for the Labour Movement was the fact that six trade unionists were among the forty-five delegates elected across the country.³⁸ In addition to Fogwill, there was former NFL president Charlie Ballam, Pierce Fudge of the NLU, D.I. Jackman of the Wabana Mine Workers' Union, Ken Brown of the FPU, and Percy Figary of the Port aux-Basques BRC. Moreover, two more members, J.R. Smallwood and William Keough, were former trade union activists. Clearly a change had taken place in political attitudes in Newfoundland since the loss of Responsible Government. There had never been more than two trade unionists (with the exception of the FPU phenomena) in the House of Assembly at the same time and usually there were none at all. Now Labour was strongly represented.

In the absence of an elected parliamentary body the NFL had been the only broadly based representative forum in the country which debated issues of national interest. It was Labour's parliament and as such considered resolutions on economic development, social welfare and the cost of living, as well as Labour's more narrow concerns. Thus Labour's voice had a prominence it would not have had otherwise. In addition their experience with the Federation developed the parliamentary skills and confidence Labour leaders needed to enter politics. The presence of trade unionists in the National Convention did not, however, mean unity of action.

³⁷ Strong, interview, April 1974.

³⁸ Joseph R. Smallwood, I Chose Canada (Toronto: Macmillan of Canada, 1975), pp. 248-249.

Labour representatives were just as divided as the rest of the population when it came to choosing between the options for future government. In an effort to bring uniformity to Labour's voice the members of the SJDLP brought a motion to the floor of the NFL's annual convention in 1946 to form a national political party having the same relationship to the NFL as the British Labour Party had to the TUC.³⁹ There was considerable support for the motion and the vote ended in a tie. Under the NFL constitution the President (now Ron Fahey of St. John's) could cast the deciding vote but even though Fahey supported the idea he abstained rather than risk splitting the Federation. Instead he recommended that interested delegates meet after the convention and form the party without the direct sponsorship of the NFL.⁴⁰ The proposal was accepted and after the convention several delegates met to elect regional organizers. Unfortunately for the nascent Newfoundland National Party [NNP] there was still no indication of what national political structure they could expect in the future. As it turned out, the political life of Newfoundland for the next two years was completely dominated by the debate surrounding the choice of the country's future political structure. The political focus was whether Newfoundlanders would endorse Confederation with Canada, Responsible Government, Commission of Government or Economic Union with the United States. Questions of political party and political philosophy were pushed far into the background.⁴¹

³⁹The Tenth Proceedings of the Annual Convention of the Newfoundland Federation of Labour (n.p., n.d.), p. 53.

⁴⁰Tenth Proceedings, p. 69.

⁴¹Noel, Politics, p. 255.

The intense feelings inspired by the Confederation debate created divisions among the NFL trade unionists that doomed the Newfoundland National Party almost as soon as it began. The official NFL stance was to side-step the Confederation question. The executive issued a statement declaring the NFL would not take sides in the debate other than to say the issue should be decided by a clear majority vote even if it meant having a second ballot.⁴² The reluctance to take a definite stand was understandable. Frank Fogwill, Ron Fahey and Bill Gillies were in favour of a return to Responsible Government. Charlie Ballam, Bill Frampton, Harry Oxford and Harold Horwood were confederates. D.I. Jackman was a prominent member of the Economic Union with the United States faction. In the midst of the referendum campaign the NNP collapsed. The SJDLP met a similar fate, hastened perhaps by the bad debts it had run up during the two election campaigns.⁴³

In the aftermath of the referendum the NFL appeared to have its fill of politics. The 1948 convention passed a resolution prohibiting its officers from running for any political party unless they first resigned their positions with the Federation or received permission at a convention or through a referendum.⁴⁴ At their semi-annual meeting five months later the NFL executive decided to officially adopt Samuel Gompers's 'support your friends, defeat your enemies', policy on political participation. Despite the presence of socialist intellectuals

⁴²Eleventh Proceedings, p. 71.

⁴³Horwood, interview, July 1975.

⁴⁴Thirteenth Proceedings, p. 22.

such as Irving Fogwill and Harold Horwood, the NFL (indeed the entire Newfoundland Labour Movement) was predominantly non-ideological. The lack of British and European immigration during the nineteenth century has already been cited as one reason; the absence of a system of electoral politics was another. After 1949, however, electoral politics were restored but still the Federation failed to renew the interest in direct political participation it had shown briefly after the War. Besides its fear of creating divisions within the Labour Movement, much of the reason for the lack of political activity can be traced to Newfoundland's first premier J.R. Smallwood.

Twenty-five days before Newfoundland's first general election as a province of Canada, the Federation's legislative committee visited Smallwood and presented him with a draft Labour Relations Act.⁴⁵ The draft was an unabashedly pro-Labour document containing provisions for compulsory union shops, compulsory collective bargaining, compulsory dues check-off, a conciliation board and a labour relations Board that could deal with "unfair" (i.e. anti-union) labour practices. Unlike the leader of the Conservative Party H.G.R. Mews, who refused even to meet with the Federation, Smallwood welcomed the opportunity to be of service to Labour. He praised the Federation for the document and promised not only a new Labour Relations Act, but new minimum wage laws, mining regulations and a new Workmens' Compensation Act as well. Just over a month later, after a landslide victory at the polls, he took the first step to

⁴⁵ The Evening Telegram, May 2, 1949.

fulfilling his promises by appointing a Labour Advisory Committee to make recommendations.⁴⁶

The favoured position in which Labour now found itself was reflected in the composition of the Committee. The only non-trade unionist on it was the chairman, lawyer Kevin Barry. The NFL was represented by Frank Brenton of the Fishermen's Protective Union of Burin East, Cyril Strong of the AFL and Bob Fogwill of the BRC. The independent unions outside the Federation were represented by Joe Thompson of the NLA and Leo Earle of the LSPU. Quite understandably the Newfoundland Board of Trade was upset at the lack of representation from the business community but their objections fell on deaf ears — ears belonging to the new minister of labour, former NFL president Charlie Ballam.⁴⁷ Incredibly, when another member was added to the Committee he too was a Labour representative — Phonse Duggan.⁴⁸ Given the composition of the committee it is not surprising to find its recommendations were carbon copies of policy resolutions adopted by the NFL.

Among the areas covered by the Committee were recommendations for a new Labour Relations Act, a revised Trade Union Act, a revised Workmen's Compensation Act, and a new Minimum Wage Act. Of the four, the most important was the Labour Relations Act. It finally brought Newfoundland into line with legislative practices

⁴⁶ The Evening Telegram, July 9, 1949.

⁴⁷ The Evening Telegram, July 18, 1949.

⁴⁸ The Evening Telegram, July 23, 1949.

followed in Canada and the United States. Its proposals followed the suggestions put forward in the NFL brief to Smallwood before the election although it stopped short of recommending the compulsory union shop.⁴⁹ In detail the new Labour Relations Act was modelled on Canada's Federal Industrial Relations and Disputes Act of 1948, but in other respects the Committee's recommendations went beyond Canadian practice. The Trade Union Act provided legal protection to any group of seven workers or more who decided to form a trade union.⁵⁰ In order to be certified as a bargaining agent and force an employer to negotiate, a union still had to sign up the fifty percent plus one of the employees required by the Labour Relations Act, but at least smaller groups did not have to worry about being sued for illegal acts committed by their members. The Workmen's Compensation Act also surpassed normal Canadian standards although that was more a result of work by Smallwood than the Committee.

Workmen's compensation had been a life-long interest for Smallwood who claimed to have read everything ever written on the subject.⁵¹ Now that he was in a position to act on his interest he was determined his Act would be the best in the world. To that end he appointed Irving Fogwill as a one-man fact-finding commission with an open-ended travel budget to go anywhere in the world and gather information on workmen's

⁴⁹ The Evening Telegram, January 16, 1950; Frank Chafe, interview, September 1975.

⁵⁰ Untitled memorandum located at the Department of Labour, St. John's, Newfoundland, file L/LG/8, dated September to December 1949; The Labour Gazette, 1950, p. 2075.

⁵¹ Smallwood, interview, June 1975.

attract new industry to the province. Speaking in the House of Assembly during the debate on the Labour Relations Act he stated:

Personally, consulting my own feelings, I would like to be associated with labour legislation that would be a model for the world but we must temper that desire with our urgent desire to attract capital to Newfoundland.⁵⁴

Items like workmen's compensation and other social legislation could be enacted without discouraging outside investors. Requests such as the compulsory union shop could not, and although the Federation continued to make legislative requests as a matter of course for the most part they shared the opinion of the International Representative of the Confectionary Workers' Union of America, John Reid, who told the 1951 NFL convention that Newfoundland had enacted some of the finest labour legislation in North America.⁵⁵

The NFL was now at its peak. Its membership was at its highest level ever and its influence with government was enormous. Why then were trade union members losing interest in the NFL and why was trade union expansion at a stand-still?

The shift to AFL-style unionism was one factor. Increasingly unions were hiring full-time business agents.⁵⁶ That development coincided with, and in part was a result of, the passage of the many post-Confederation labour laws. Before 1949 (excepting the

⁵⁴ Gwyn, Smallwood, p. 130.

⁵⁵ The Evening Telegram, July 25, 1951.

⁵⁶ Horwood, interview, July 1975; Chafe, interview, September 1975.

compensation legislation. What finally emerged was an act much like Ontario's. Unlike previous Newfoundland acts, it was based on the principle of collective rather than individual liability.⁵² That meant that employers paid for the awards made under the act out of a compulsory contributory insurance fund administered by a government-appointed board. No longer did employees have to sue their employers to get compensation. Where the act went beyond Ontario's was that it increased the number and types of diseases covered and reduced the waiting period for submitting a claim from three days to one. In the spring of 1950 the House of Assembly passed the Labour Relations Act, the Trade Union Act and the Minimum Wage Act recommended by the committee. Later, when Fogwill was finished his study, it passed the Women's Compensation Act as well.

In little more than a year all the Federation's major legislative demands were suddenly fulfilled. In addition the Federation's authority within the Labour Movement was bolstered since the government now turned to it to nominate labour representatives to government committees such as the Labour Relations Board and the Minimum Wage Board.⁵³ Unlike the wartime committees on which the Federation was represented these committees had real power since it was up to them to interpret and implement the legislation.

If there was any ambivalence in Smallwood's desire to grant Labour all its demands it was only to the extent he was fearful a Trade Union Movement that was too strong would hurt his plan to

⁵²The Evening Telegram, April 12, 1950.

⁵³Letter from Charles Ballam to Donald McDonald, dated February 12, 1953. Located in the National Archives, Ottawa.

war years) most labour relations occurred between individual unions and individual employers. The government had few pieces of social legislation that pertained directly to the workplace and even fewer regulations relating to collective bargaining. After 1949 matters were not so simple. Government now played a significant role. Every aspect of labour relations was regulated by law and so labour relations became more complicated. As a result, unions came to rely more and more on the expertise of their business agents. As that trend became established participation by the rank and file declined and matters of organization and negotiation became the property of the 'professional'. The attitude carried over into the Federation.

Another factor that contributed to a decline in interest in the NFL was its changed status. The Federation naturally had more prestige as a national labour central than it did as one of ten provincial organizations. Whereas once the NFL had real power, in that it could grant union charters and help smaller unions with their negotiations, it was now merely an arm of the TLC. Its direct organizing function — the activity which made the Federation the catalyst in a Movement rather than just another bureaucracy — was taken over by the internationals and the AFL and TLC representatives. That left the Federation with its legislative function and even though the NFL made its greatest legislative progress during the early fifties its success was due more to the presence of Joe Smallwood than to its own vigor. As a result, a sense of complacency developed within the Federation. After all, what need was there for militance if legislative reform could be taken almost for the asking? Furthermore, why take a

chance on jeopardizing such a productive relationship by getting involved in direct politics. The burst of political activity in 1945 and 1946 showed that there was a substantial number of trade unionists in the NFL who did believe in direct political action, but with Smallwood in the premiership their numbers dwindled. The question left unanswered by the retreat from electoral politics, however, was what would happen if Smallwood ever decided to turn against Labour? The question was answered in 1959.

CHAPTER SEVEN

THE IWA STRIKE

The year 1959 was a decisive turning point for the NFL. It was the year the Federation became involved in a bitter confrontation with its long-time benefactor, Joey Smallwood. The immediate issue was a strike by loggers employed by the AND Company in Grand Falls, but at no time was the IWA Strike, as it became known, just another labour dispute. As Richard Gwyn has observed, in terms of social impact its closest comparison in recent Canadian history was the strike at Asbestos, Quebec in 1949.¹ The fundamental issues were the same: autocracy versus democracy; social justice versus civil order.

To understand the Federation's role it is necessary to examine the events of the IWA Strike in detail: It is important to do so for two reasons. The first is that the strike almost destroyed the Federation, reducing its influence and power to its lowest level since 1937. The second is that this was the NFL's 'moment of truth'. The crisis provoked by the strike forced the NFL to reassess its historic reliance on conciliatory tactics. More than any other event, the strike brought the strengths and weaknesses of the Federation into sharp focus. A narrative survey of the NFL's first eighteen years reveals the outline

¹ Richard Gwyn, Smallwood, The Unlikely Revolutionary (2nd. ed.; Toronto and Montreal: McClelland and Stewart Limited, 1972), p. 200.

of the Federation's corporate 'body'; the IWA Strike revealed its essential 'personality'.

The steps leading up to the Federation's involvement can be traced back to 1949. That year the Workers' Central Protective Union of Deer Lake [WCPU] (one of the four loggers' unions) received a charter from the NFL.² The executive of the Newfoundland Lumbermen's Association also committed their union to membership in the Federation subject to a vote among their rank and file which was ratified by their 6000 members in 1950.³ With surprising suddenness the NFL had come close to fulfilling one of its founding goals — to bring all categories of Newfoundland workers into one central organization.⁴ It was an achievement the Federation had pursued with vigor for thirteen years but, ironically, it contained the seeds of the NFL's destruction as an effective force in the life of Newfoundland.

Under the terms of the 1949 merger between the NFL and the TLC, unions chartered by the NFL before 1950 were allowed to retain their independent status.⁵ In 1956 the situation changed. The TLC merged with its long-time rival the CCL to form the Canadian Labour

² The Evening Telegram, January 29, 1949.

³ Letter from Donald McDonald to Pat Conroy, March 9, 1949. Located in the National Archives, Ottawa, file MG 28 I 103, Vol. 109.

⁴ The province's other loggers' unions remained outside the Federation, but a majority (53.6 percent) of loggers were now joined to the mainstream of the Newfoundland Labour Movement. Calculated from raw data.

⁵ Cohen, Royal Commission, p. 80.

Congress.⁶ The terms of that merger were much more stringent than the TLC-NFL merger. There were to be no independent unions. The independents could join as internationals or obtain a direct charter from the CLC. If they did not they were to be considered "dual" organizations and fair game for raiding by CLC affiliates.⁷

Most independent unions in Newfoundland were not members of the NFL and in anticipation of the merger Federation president Frank Chafe (who had become the TLC's full-time business agent in Newfoundland) attacked the independents as a "king-sized problem."⁸ In the June edition of *The Federator* he accused the independent unions of bitterly contesting attempts by the NFL to establish bargaining rights on behalf of their members. He warned the independents that if they did not join the Federation soon the NFL would "have to consider that those who are not with us are against us and govern ourselves accordingly." Obviously the impending merger had presented the NFL with a serious problem. Despite Chafe's reference to past conflicts, historically the NFL had avoided confrontation with independent unions. Although the Federation leadership believed all Newfoundland unions should belong to a strong central organization they did not believe the principle was worth the conflict that would result from a raid.⁹ Now the merger forced the NFL

⁶Gad Horowitz, Canadian Labour in Politics (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1968), pp. 162-98.

⁷Cohen, Royal Commission, p. 80.

⁸The Federator, Vol. 3, No. 2 (June 1956), 4.

⁹Strong, interview, April 1974; Chafe, interview, September 1975.

into a confrontation position, and because the NLA was an independent NFL affiliate (the WCPU was expelled in 1955 for non-payment of dues), it had to be dealt with immediately.

The NFL gave the NLA until October 1956, the date of the NLA's next annual convention, to decide whether they would join an international or retain their independent status.¹⁰ J.J. Thompson, the president of the NLA, would have preferred to keep the union his own personal fiefdom.¹¹ For twenty years he had run the NLA exactly the way he wished but now he saw there was little he could do to maintain complete control. Even before the TLC-CCL merger the two unions with jurisdiction over loggers in the rest of North America — the United Brotherhood of Carpenters and Joiners [UBCJ] and the IWA — approached Thompson letting him know they were interested in absorbing his union.¹² Apparently for personal reasons Thompson decided to favour the UBCJ.¹³ Thompson had asked both unions to honour a clause in the NLA constitution guaranteeing him a salary for life.¹⁴ Both unions rejected the request. The UBCJ did, however, offer him a job as a business agent with all the usual salary and pension benefits.

¹⁰The Federator, Vol. 3, No. 3, 15; The Evening Telegram, July 26, 1956.

¹¹Rolf Hattenhauer, "A Brief Labour History of Newfoundland" (xeroxed manuscript prepared for The Royal Commission on Labor Legislation in Newfoundland and Labrador, Summer 1970) p. 199. Located in the Main Library, Memorial University of Newfoundland.

¹²Letter from Frank Chafe to Joe Mackenzie, September 11, 1956. Located in personal file of Frank Chafe.

¹³Hattenhauer, "Labour History of Newfoundland," pp. 199-201.

¹⁴Hattenhauer, "Labour History of Newfoundland," p. 199.

the fight on his own. The conflict was now between a CLC affiliate and a 'dual' organization. Many of the NFL unionists considered Thompson a friend but their sense of loyalty to the 'legitimate' Canadian Labour Movement and their desire to remain in good standing with their international unions reluctantly convinced them they should support the IWA.

Before the NLA's convention Chafe had briefed Ladd and Cooper on the jurisdictional lines in the Newfoundland woods industry, the contracts held by the independent unions and the history of the Woods Labour Board.¹⁹ Once the IWA organizing drive began Ladd began to pressure Chafe through CLC president Jodoin to make a public declaration in favour of the IWA.²⁰ Ladd felt such a declaration was necessary because the IWA was running into stiff opposition from Thompson, the paper companies and the Newfoundland media. Thompson in particular had done an effective job of playing on Newfoundlanders' traditional resentment of mainlanders*. He characterized the IWA as a union interested only in fattening its coffers on the dues of Newfoundland loggers and of coming in to tell Newfoundlanders how to run their own affairs.²¹

The high profile style of the IWA reinforced Thompson's accusations. When the AND Company refused the IWA organizers access to

¹⁹ Transcript of interview with Frank Chafe by Donna Butt, July 20, 1975. Copy in possession of the author.

²⁰ Telegram from Claude Jodoin to Frank Chafe, December 19, 1956. Copy in possession of the author.

²¹ The Newfoundland Weekly, February 8, 1957; The Evening Telegram, January 31, 1957.

*The term 'mainlander' refers to any Canadian citizen not born in Newfoundland.

But when Thompson tried to convince the delegates to the NLA convention to accept the UBCJ they refused.¹⁵ Based on presentations made to the convention by H. Landon Ladd, the IWA's eastern regional director and Andy Cooper, the UBCJ's regional representative, the delegates voted twenty-six to sixteen to affiliate with the IWA.¹⁶ Thompson was chairing the meeting and ruled that on such an important question there must be a two-thirds majority. He then put another motion calling for the question of affiliation to be put off to some future date. On that motion the vote was twenty-one to twenty-one and Thompson used his double vote as chairman to break the tie.

The delegates supporting the IWA were outraged. They immediately approached Ladd and asked him to organize a raid on the NLA. Ladd agreed and before the year was out he was back in Newfoundland setting up an organizing drive.¹⁷ As for the NFL their original hope had been to stay clear of the conflict. Earlier CLC president Claude Jodoin had advised Chafe that the CLC planned to remain neutral in what looked like an impending battle between two CLC affiliates.¹⁸ When it became clear, however, that the IWA had the support of the loggers the UBCJ faded into the background leaving Thompson to carry on

¹⁵Letter from Frank Chafe to Henry Harm, October 22, 1956. Copy in possession of the author.

¹⁶"Minutes of the Bi-Annual Meeting of the Newfoundland Federation of Labour at Grand Falls, January 8, 1957." Three-page memorandum dated January 23, 1957 in the possession of the author.

¹⁷The Evening Telegram, January 7, 1957.

¹⁸The Evening Telegram, October 19, 1956.

the logging camps, the union rented aircraft and parachuted them in. The IWA took out full-page advertisements and bought radio spots to publicize their drive and their attack on the AND Company and Thompson.²² They vowed to break the trespass laws if necessary to recruit members.²³ To the loggers the show of willpower and dedication was a welcome sign of concern after the indifferent service provided by the NLA but to most of the public it was a sign the IWA did not share Newfoundlanders' respect for the rule of law.

Even within the NFL there was resentment. Although Chafe and Ladd respected each other they were very different personalities. Ladd was emotional, a fiery orator struck by the miserable conditions of the loggers and moved to do something about it. The organizing drive was more than just another expansion of the union's operations; it was a crusade. In the early stages of the drive Ladd and some of his lieutenants made no secret of the fact they considered the organization of the loggers the first step in a broader social upheaval in Newfoundland.²⁴ The IWA organizers, most of whom were political socialists, were used to the close relationship that existed between organized labour and the CCF in Ontario and British Columbia. As far as they were concerned it was a natural and necessary alliance for working people to make and they felt

²²The Evening Telegram, February 2, 1957.

²³Telegram from Harvey Ladd to Claude Jodoin, December 17, 1956. Located in the National Archives, Ottawa, file MG 28 I 103, Vol. 43.

²⁴Gwyn, Smallwood, 2nd. ed., p. 201.

there was no reason it should be any different here.²⁵ It was a gross over-simplification and revealed an acute ignorance of Newfoundland political history. A brief exchange recalled by Ladd between Chafe and himself sums up the problem. "Frank, you should be vibrating," said Ladd, "There's a revolution going on out there." Chafe's terse reply was "I don't vibrate."²⁶

Although Chafe respected Ladd's dedication he found him impatient, not fully aware of local conditions and not always willing to take advice.²⁷ When Ladd told him he intended to apply for certification even before the organizing drive was complete Chafe advised him against it. Ladd's intention was based on a decision by the Ontario Labour Relations Board which allowed parent unions to apply for recognition even though they did not have their local organizations fully in place. As Chafe predicted, the IWA's first application for certification was rejected. The Newfoundland Labour Relations Board ruled the IWA did not have a fully-constituted local with a duly elected local executive.²⁸ The rejection set the IWA organizing drive back six months and allowed Thompson and the paper companies even more time to blacken the IWA's reputation.

²⁵ Interview with H. Bandon Ladd by Donna Butt, 1975.

²⁶ Interview with Ladd by Donna Butt, 1975.

²⁷ Interview with Frank Chafe by Donna Butt, July 1975.

²⁸ The Evening Telegram, June 6, 1957; The Daily News, June 6, 1957.

But Chafe's reservations about the IWA ran deeper than a personal coolness toward Ladd. Chafe felt it was the responsibility of the NFL to look after the best interests of the entire Labour Movement and associating the name of the Federation too closely with a union as unpopular as the IWA could only detract from the prestige of the NFL.²⁹

The force of events, however, dictated the NFL could not remain at a distance for long. It took almost a year and a half but the IWA was finally certified as the bargaining agent for loggers working in central Newfoundland for the AND Company.³⁰ Other certifications followed for loggers working for contractors hired by Bowaters, but the first contract negotiations began with AND in June 1958. As a paper company executive admitted a few years later, the companies did everything they could to avoid signing a contract.³¹ In part this was in line with a general trend in the paper industry in North America. Productivity and sales had peaked in 1957 and the companies were caught in a cost-price squeeze. Their response was a "new toughness" policy in which they went on the offensive and even tried to get unions to give up benefits won in past contracts.³² The AND Company, moreover, was in the process of mechanizing its woods operations and of trimming its workforce, a situation in which they would have much preferred to

²⁹"Minutes of Bi-Annual Meeting, January 8, 1957."

³⁰The Evening Telegram, April 22, 1958.

³¹The Evening Telegram, April 7, 1959.

³²Jamieson, Trouble, p. 358.

deal with the more pliable independent unions than the militant IWA.

The IWA knew this and deliberately moderated its demands, accepting a conciliation board report calling for a five cent an hour increase in wages, a reduction of the work week from sixty hours to fifty-four, and improved camp conditions.³³ The company rejected the report saying its recommendations "would cripple the entire AND operations."³⁴ Soon afterwards ninety-eight percent of the loggers voted to strike, and the date was set for 7:00 a.m., December 31, 1958.³⁵

Given the acrimonious and extended raid on the NLA and the crucial importance of the paper industry to the anemic Newfoundland economy it was inevitable that the strike would become the focus of public attention. Ladd tried to keep the strike as peaceful as possible and on February 4, 1959 the RCMP officer in charge of policing the strike commented that the strike was going along smoothly, with the lack of violence one of its better aspects. But the IWA was subjected to even more vitriolic criticism than it had been during the raid.³⁶ The coverage given the strike by Newfoundland newspapers was blatantly anti-union. A headline in *The Grand Falls Advertiser* reporting charges against fourteen men for sitting on a log pile to prevent a contractor from delivering it to the mill read, "Law Catches up with the Lawe

³³ Gwyn, Smallwood, 2nd. ed., p. 203.

³⁴ Text of a radio broadcast by T.R. Moore, President and General Manager of the AND Company, December 18, 1958. Copy in the possession of author.

³⁵ Gwyn, Smallwood, 2nd ed., p. 203.

³⁶ The Evening Telegram, January 14, 22, 1959.

the Federation (with Ladd's approval) went to Premier Smallwood and asked him to intervene on the side of the union.⁴¹ Given Smallwood's pro-Labour sympathies and the record of his government, it seemed a reasonable tactic. What the Federation over-looked were the earlier statements by the IWA that the loggers would form the basis of a new political order in Newfoundland. Smallwood had solidified his grip on political power by ruthlessly eliminating opposition both inside and outside his party and for him any new political order was a threat.⁴² When the new president of the Federation, Larry Daley, Frank Chafe (representing the CLC) and other members of the NFL executive went to meet with Smallwood on February 9, 1959 they asked that police protection provided to the AND Company be removed on the grounds the police were being used to escort strike breakers across the picket line.⁴³ Smallwood listened but made no commitment. Shortly afterwards he announced he would go on province-wide radio to talk about the strike.

On the evening of February 12 Smallwood went on the air, and while neither the Federation nor the IWA had been given advance notice of what the premier would say, at the very least they expected a proposal to get the two sides back to the bargaining table. To their

down the mill and therefore threatened their security. On January 12, 1959 the GFDLTC issued a statement saying they did not support the IWA. Despite pressure from the CLC, the NFL and the International Mill Unions, they refused to change their stand.

⁴¹ Chafe, interview, September 1975.

⁴² Gwyn, Smallwood, 2nd ed., p. 199.

⁴³ The Evening Telegram, February 10, 1959.

Breakers."³⁷ Editorial pages often read like company press releases especially after Harold Horwood (now a columnist with *The Evening Telegram*) and Ed Finn and Tom Cahill of *The Western Star* resigned in protest over their papers biased coverage of the strike.³⁸ In this situation the NFL abandoned its detached position and put its full support behind the IWA.

On January 14 the Federation issued a statement warning the whole Trade Union Movement was being placed in jeopardy by unfounded attacks on the IWA and urged all NFL affiliates to support the strike morally and financially.³⁹ Their appeal met with a strong response. Thousands of dollars were sent to the IWA strike fund from locals all over the province.⁴⁰ As the strike entered its second month, however,

³⁷ The Evening Telegram, January 23, 1959.

³⁸ Ed Finn, interview, July 1975; Horwood, interview July 1975.

³⁹ The Evening Telegram, January 15, 1959.

⁴⁰ Although a majority of the Federation membership supported the strike there were dissenters. The two most significant groups were the Newfoundland locals of the UBCJ and the Grand Falls District Labour Council.

The UBCJ of course had not given up hopes of organizing the loggers themselves so their lack of support for the IWA was expected; but the Grand Falls Labour Council did represent a serious split in what the Federation had hoped would be a united front. The Council claimed that it opposed the IWA because it did not agree with their tactics which they said were violent, offering as proof the fact that some company property had been destroyed. They also resented the fact the IWA had not come to them, during the organizing drive or during the strike, to brief them or to ask for their help. The Council's attitude went far deeper than that however. The backbone of the Council was made up of the five AND mill unions. Traditionally mill workers had viewed themselves as an elite. They made more money than loggers (\$1.78 per hour for a common labourer and \$4.00 per hour for tradesmen at the time the loggers were striking for \$1.05 per hour), and consequently lived in better houses and wore better clothes. The strike threatened to close

utter amazement Smallwood's speech was not conciliatory in the least. It was, in fact, an unbridled, vitriolic attack on the IWA.⁴⁴ While claiming the loggers should have a strong union he said the IWA was a failure because it had led its membership into a strike that should never have been called. He suggested that the loggers run the IWA out of the province. He further added that they should join a brand new union, one which would also encompass fishermen. He would personally see that this new union would succeed and had already asked Max Lane, the Liberal MHA and general secretary of the FPU, to lead it. He argued that the new union could join the NFL, which he reasoned would gladly accept it since it would have as many members as the Federation itself.

The Federation, Ladd and the loggers were stunned. Almost immediately Daley issued a press release declaring the Newfoundland Brotherhood of Woodworkers [NBWW], as Smallwood's new union would be called, was not welcome in the NFL. In addition, Daley asked the CLC to initiate a nation-wide fund-raising campaign to support the IWA.⁴⁵ Despite its earlier misgivings the NFL now fully supported Ladd and his union.

The NFL's position was a flat rejection of Smallwood and Smallwood responded by rejecting the NFL and the IWA. On March 6

⁴⁴Text of radio broadcast by J.R. Smallwood, February 12, 1959. Copy in possession of the author.

⁴⁵[Newfoundland Federation of Labour], Report on the Current Dispute in Newfoundland (n.p.: September 5, 1961), 12 page pamphlet.

the House of Assembly passed two emergency labour laws.⁴⁶ The first law decertified the IWA locals in Newfoundland (removed their right to act as legally recognized bargaining agents). The second was much broader. It gave the Lieutenant-Governor-in-Council (in practice the Cabinet and hence Smallwood himself) the power to dissolve any trade union in Newfoundland. Smallwood also introduced amendments to the Labour Relations Act prohibiting secondary boycotts and making trade unions liable for illegal acts committed on their behalf.⁴⁷ The CLC, the NFL and trade unionists in many countries condemned the bills as a threat to the security of unions everywhere and even before the two bills were passed the loggers' strike had become a *cause celebre* among trade unionists.⁴⁸ George Meany, president of the AFL-CIO, wired his support as did the Trade Union Congress of Great Britain.⁴⁹ Dockworkers in England and New Orleans refused to unload ships carrying paper produced at the AND

⁴⁶The Evening Telegram, March 4, 6, 1959.

⁴⁷"Labour Relations (Amendment) Act," three-page mimeographed copy of amendments, located at the Newfoundland Department of Manpower and Industrial Relations, file L/37, M. and I.R. Copy in possession of the author.

Although the author was allowed generous access to the files of the Newfoundland Department of Manpower and Industrial Relations, the files were extremely incomplete. In addition, very few of the documents provided insight into the relationship between the government and the NFL. An even more difficult problem was encountered in attempting to gain information from the Canadian Department of Labour. A thirty year embargo on the release of documents prevents access to most information relevant to this thesis.

⁴⁸Memorandum from CLC vice-president William Dodge to Henry Rhodes, assistant director of organization, CLC, February 17, 1959. Memo outlines seven point plan to publicize the loggers' strike across Canada. Copy in possession of the author. IWA News, May 1959.

⁴⁹The Evening Telegram, January 22, 1959.

mill.⁵⁰ In several Canadian cities local labour councils set up collection boxes, organized raffles and sponsored social events to raise money for the loggers' strike fund — a drive that brought in \$865,000.⁵¹ In addition, the CLC lobbied Prime Minister Diefenbaker to declare Smallwood's emergency labour laws unconstitutional.⁵²

It was one of the largest coordinated efforts in the history of the Canadian Labour Movement but it was largely unsuccessful. Following Smallwood's speech on February 12 the paper companies became more explicit in their determination not to deal with the IWA. In a joint statement the AND Company and Bowaters vowed that if their wood supplies ran out they would shut down their operations.⁵³ On the other hand, the companies agreed to negotiate with the NBWW. Although exact membership figures were never released, thanks to Smallwood and the companies, the NBWW managed to attract sufficient membership to handle the AND woods operation. Two weeks after his radio address Smallwood spent a week in central Newfoundland promoting his union.⁵⁴ Although

⁵⁰ IWA News, May 1959; The Evening Telegram, February 6, 1959.

⁵¹ "The Canadian Labour Congress and the Newfoundland Loggers' Strike," four page memorandum prepared by the CLC summarizing its activities during the strike (n.d.). Copy in possession of the author. Report on the Current Dispute (September 5, 1961).

⁵² "Petition of the Canadian Labour Congress to the Governor-General-in-Council for Disallowance of the Newfoundland Trade Union (Emergency Provisions) Act, 1959," twenty-one page brief prepared by the CLC, Ottawa, March 10, 1959. Copy in possession of the author.

⁵³ The Evening Telegram, February 23, 1959.

⁵⁴ The Evening Telegram, February 24, 1949.

some of his converts were men who had given up on the IWA, most full-time loggers remained fiercely loyal to Ladd and their union. Most of Smallwood's audiences were fishermen who stood to lose their traditional part-time winter livelihood as the AND woods operations went year-round.⁵⁵ The decisive factor, however, was the AND's refusal to hire loggers who could not show an NBWW membership card. The consequences of that policy were so severe that even the IWA advised its members to take out membership in the NBWW if their personal circumstances became desperate.⁵⁶ Then, on March 12, 1959 the Company announced it had signed a collective agreement with the NBWW. What made the agreement particularly demoralizing to the IWA was that it called for the same five cent an hour increase they had been refused ten weeks earlier. Defiantly Ladd vowed to fight on and since Smallwood's legislation only decertified the specific IWA locals set up during the organizing drive, technically the IWA could have formed new locals and tried again.⁵⁷ In reality, however, the strike had been lost even before the contract.

Despite Ladd's attempts to avoid violence, on March 10, 1959 a policeman was killed in a battle between police and loggers in Badger. According to Ray Timson of *The Toronto Star*, the only reporter to witness the incident, the confrontation was a police riot.⁵⁸ The loggers had gathered in Badger for a meeting and the police responded by

⁵⁵ The Globe and Mail, March 21, 1959.

⁵⁶ Gwyn, Smallwood, 2nd ed., p. 220.

⁵⁷ "Statement by H. Landon Ladd, President, District Two, I.W.A.," one-page typewritten statement, March 6, 1959. Copy in possession of author.

⁵⁸ The Toronto Daily Star, March 11, 1959.

bringing in fifty members of the Newfoundland Constabulary to reinforce the normal sixteen-man garrison maintained by the RCMP. On the evening of March 10 the loggers congregated at the local picket line and in the course of their picketing blocked a car carrying three non-union loggers. They lifted the car, turned it around, and gave it a shove sending it spinning twenty feet down the road. Shortly afterwards sixty-six policemen carrying eighteen-inch billy clubs waded into the picket line cracking skulls as they went. In the struggle Constable William Moss was struck on the head and died in hospital in Grand Falls. It was never determined whether Moss had been killed by a logger or struck by one of his fellow policemen; but that did not stop Smallwood from turning the incident to his political advantage.⁵⁹ Moss's body was placed in a flag-draped coffin and brought back to St. John's on a train that stopped at every station along the way. He was given a funeral with full military honours and a monument was constructed to his memory in front of the Constabulary headquarters at Fort Townshend. Public opinion was turned even more solidly against the IWA and any hope Ladd had of reorganizing his locals vanished. However, for the NFL the battle was just beginning.⁶⁰

Throughout its history the NFL had avoided confrontation. Now suddenly, it was locked in the ultimate confrontation — a confrontation with the full power and authority of the State. The leaders of the NFL did not back away from what they perceived to be their obligation to the working class and the Trade Union Movement. The early idealism of Duggan, Sparks, and the Fogwills may have been muted by the transition

⁵⁹ Gryn, Smallwood, 2nd ed., p. 214.

⁶⁰ News, untitled three-page press release, Canadian Labour Congress, Ottawa, March 12, 1959. Copy in possession of the author.

to business unionism in the 1950s, but the old idealism was quickly revived. Despite earlier misgivings the leadership of the Federation gradually became convinced of the IWA's sincerity.⁶¹ From that point on their support was vigorous, generous and unqualified. When Smallwood introduced his two emergency bills, however, the Federation's role quickly changed from supporting player to protagonist.

The labour bills cut the bond between the Federation and Smallwood and this was apparent at the NFL's July 1959 convention. Only the year before the delegates had given Smallwood a standing ovation after a speech in which he spoke of his own labour roots.⁶² This time they branded him a "liar" and "a character assassin."⁶³ With the exception of the Newfoundland Government Employees Association [NGEA], which was understandably sensitive to reprisals, Smallwood could take against its members, the delegates were unanimous in condemning the "emergency labour bills" as "an attempt to destroy free trade unionism."⁶⁴ Moreover, they decided to reverse the Federation's long-standing policy of political non-involvement.

As long as there was a sympathetic government in power, political neutrality had usually guaranteed the Federation a strong

⁶¹ Interview with Frank Chafe by Donna Butt, July 1975.

⁶² Report of the Proceedings of the Twenty-Second Annual Convention of the Newfoundland Federation of Labour (St. John's: Guardian Limited, 1958).

⁶³ Report of the Proceedings of the Twenty-Third Annual Convention of the Newfoundland Federation of Labour (St. John's: Guardian Limited, 1959).

⁶⁴ Twenty-Third Proceedings, p. 16.

Term 29⁶⁸ and Diefenbaker's "attacks" on him during the IWA strike.⁶⁹

The Federation on the other hand was determined to make the issue Smallwood and his assault on Labour.⁷⁰

Two days after the election call the executive of the NFL met in St. John's. They decided to form a Labour Party backed by the NFL but broad enough to include sympathetic non-trade unionists.⁷¹ The party was named the Newfoundland Democratic Party [NDP] and incorporated the tiny Newfoundland CCF organization. Because of lack of time before election day most of the organizational assistance, money and candidates came from the NFL.⁷² Thirty-three year old Ed Finn, now the CLC's information officer on the west coast, was elected leader and by the time nominations closed on August 10 nineteen candidates had been nominated.⁷³

The NFL, with organizational help from the CEC, mounted a modestly effective campaign in the short time available. The novelty

⁶⁸ Term 29 was a clause contained in the terms of union between Canada and Newfoundland. It called for future cash payments to Newfoundland to compensate for the transfer of authority over customs and excise duties to Canada. The controversy arose when Prime Minister John Diefenbaker declared he would impose a time limit on the payments.

⁶⁹ The Evening Telegram, July 28, 1959.

⁷⁰ Horowitz, Labour, p. 246.

⁷¹ The Evening Telegram, August 3, 1959.

⁷² Horowitz, Labour, p. 245.

⁷³ The Evening Telegram, August 10, 1959.

influence in government policy. Just how tenuous that influence was became obvious in 1959. Smallwood had attacked the IWA and had introduced two bills which the NFL considered violently anti-Labour. When the NFL criticized him for his behaviour Smallwood cut them out of the government process.⁶⁵ Whereas previously the Federation executive had been allowed to choose the labour representatives on powerful government committees such as the Labour Relations Board, Smallwood began to appoint his own representatives. It was just one instance that clearly defined the limits of the NFL's political influence. The Labour Movement could play a role in pushing government to adopt its social and political policies more quickly than they might otherwise have done, but that was all. As long as the Federation had no real political power the government did not have to take it any more seriously than it chose to. The choice facing delegates to the 1959 convention was obvious. In order to re-establish political influence it was necessary for the Federation to become directly involved in politics. To that end the delegates voted to take direct political action although the exact form the political action would take was left to the discretion of the executive.⁶⁶ The course of events, however, forced the executive to act quickly. Less than a week after the convention Smallwood called a provincial election for August 20.⁶⁷ The issues, according to Smallwood were Prime Minister Diefenbaker's unwillingness to renegotiate

⁶⁵ Ed Finn, Jr., "Newfoundland Curbs Unions," Canadian Labour, November 1962.

⁶⁶ Twenty-Third Proceedings, pp. 13-14.

⁶⁷ The Evening Telegram, July 28, 1959.

of the NDP and their attacks on Smallwood attracted a good deal of attention in the media but not enough to make the new party a winner at the polls, although it finished second in ten ridings and collected seven percent of the vote.⁷⁴ Perhaps Smallwood felt the NDP was a force to be reckoned with for less than a year after the election he began to show signs he wanted to end the confrontation with Labour, indicating he might be willing to amend his two labour bills.⁷⁵ It was a peace initiative the labour leaders who had been closest to the IWA (Chafe, Cyril Strong and Esau Thoms, a Federation vice-president and the former leader of the Newfoundland CCF) viewed with suspicion.⁷⁶ Others, such as the Federation's secretary-treasurer Steve Neary, felt it was an opportunity worth seizing.⁷⁷

The NFL executive closeted themselves in a room in the Hotel Newfoundland with Eugene Forsey, the CLC's legislative expert, to work out a series of amendments to the changes Smallwood had made to the Labour Relations Act. While the discussions were in progress, however, the president of the AFL-CIO, George Meany, announced that as a result of a Senate investigation into "labour racketeering" he was expelling the Teamsters Union from the national labour central.⁷⁸ Since the CLC was linked to the AFL-CIO it too expelled the Teamsters and hence the

⁷⁴ The Evening Telegram, August 21, 1959.

⁷⁵ The Evening Telegram, May 26, 1959.

⁷⁶ Strong, interview, April 1974.

⁷⁷ Steve Neary, interview, April 1980. In addition to his service with the Federation, Mr. Neary later became Minister of Labour in the Smallwood government.

⁷⁸ Dulles, Labor, p. 385.

NFL had to expell the Teamsters. This meant that Larry Daley, the Teamsters Newfoundland business agent, had to resign as president of the Federation.⁷⁹ According to the NFL constitution the executive officer designated to take over as interim president was the secretary-treasurer, in this instance Steve Neary.⁸⁰

During the IWA strike and the provincial election Neary was a strong supporter of the IWA and direct political action. He was the president of the clerical union at the DOSCO iron mine on Bell Island and ran for the NDP. But he felt the NFL would suffer if the confrontation with Smallwood continued. Without informing the group working on the amendments which the Federation was going to demand in the Labour Relations Act, Neary decided to make peace.⁸¹ He arranged a meeting with Smallwood and, even though Forsey, Chafe, Strong and Thoms disapproved, he got support from three of the four NFL vice-presidents.⁸² The meeting was held but neither Smallwood or Neary gave any public indication of what was decided.

On June 7, 1960 the NFL presented its brief on the amendments to the Labour Relations Act.⁸³ The brief called the changes

⁷⁹ The Evening Telegram, June 2, 1960.

⁸⁰ The Evening Telegram, June 2, 1960.

⁸¹ Strong, interview, April 1974; Finn, interview, July 1975.

⁸² Horowitz, Labour, pp. 246-47.

⁸³ "Newfoundland Act 1960," three-page xeroxed paper located in the National Archives, Ottawa. Details changes demanded by the NFL in bills 33 and 36, Labour Relations (Amendment) Act, MG 28 I 103, Vol. 244 (n.d.).

"a fatal thrust at union security" although it agreed that some of the amendments to which Smallwood had publically committed himself would "in some respects appear to mitigate our objections." This was a reference to the premier's intention to transfer the authority to decertify unions from the cabinet to the Supreme Court. But the brief went on to say that "in the main our objections remain untouched..." That was a reference to the fact the amendments had outlawed strikes by hospital workers and placed restrictions on international unions operating in the province.⁸⁴ But then Neary went on to announce that the two year war between Smallwood and the Federation was over and that he had assured Smallwood that ninety percent of the contents of the two bills were acceptable to the unions.⁸⁵

Neary's statement astounded labour leaders who had supported the IWA — a majority of the Federation. Privately they accused Neary of betraying the Federation for the promise of a safe seat in the House of Assembly — a suspicion that did not diminish when Neary emerged as the Liberal candidate on Bell Island in the next provincial general election. CLC president Claude Jodoin ordered Neary to retract his statements and once again made it clear "that the organized free trade union movement in Newfoundland would never be satisfied until the infamous anti-democratic bills one and two ... were rescinded."⁸⁶

⁸⁴"Newfoundland Act 1960," p. 3.

⁸⁵The Evening Telegram, June 7, 1960.

⁸⁶The Evening Telegram, June 20, 1960.

Neary refused and a month later the issue became the focus of the Federation's annual convention.

Esau Thoms opposed Neary in the presidential election. Thoms won by a margin of fifty-four to thirty and, in addition, a complete slate of Thoms' vice-presidents were elected.⁸⁷ The vote indicated the Federation had chosen principle over pragmatism. Smallwood's handling of the IWA strike and his subsequent legislation convinced a majority of the NFL leadership that the only honourable response was a complete rejection of the premier and his government. Neary was seen as the Trojan Horse through which Smallwood was attempting to take over the Federation and his defeat was a rejection of Smallwood.⁸⁸ It was the first time the Federation abandoned its conciliatory style and vigorously promoted policies contrary to those of the government.

The Federation's confrontation with the government had developed piecemeal. If the Federation had not been dragged into the

⁸⁷ The Evening Telegram, July 15, 1960; Neary, interview, April 1980. Mr. Neary's account of events differs considerably from that contained in the text. Mr. Neary claims he was the main supporter of the IWA within the Federation; he depicts everyone else as weak and half-hearted; he takes credit for being the founder of the NDP; he depicts Chafe, Strong and Daley as puppets of the CLC; and he vigorously denies the suggestion he sold out the Federation for a seat in the House of Assembly. Besides the failure of the other leaders of the Federation to be as militant as himself, Mr. Neary says his primary disagreement with them was over policies. He wanted the NDP and the NFL to remain completely separate - they wanted the two integrated. Mr. Neary is, however, the only source the author could find for this point of view. His evidence is not supported by any documentary sources and in almost every particular contradicts the evidence of other interviewees, contemporary newspaper accounts, letters, documents and the narrative accounts contained in Horowitz's Canadian Labour in Politics, and Gwyn's Smallwood, The Unlikely Revolutionary.

⁸⁸ The Evening Telegram, July 19, 1960. Also the opinion expressed by Strong, Horwood, Chafe and Finn in personal interviews. Because of the wide-spread belief that Neary was a traitor, the Federation later passed a resolution barring him for life from NFL conventions.

IWA strike against its will, then certainly it was dragged in against its instincts. Whatever the reasons, the final effects on the Federation were devastating. In 1958 the NFL consisted of seventy-three unions and 22,328 members.⁸⁹ By 1963 it was reduced to sixty-one unions and 12,476 members.⁹⁰ The NFL lost 5000 members due to the IWA decertification and the Newfoundland Government Employee's Association withdrawal after the Federation's decision to enter politics. More indicative of the decline, however, was the fact that many of the smaller international locals failed to renew their membership.⁹¹

Smallwood set out to create an anti-union climate and he was so effective that even international union business agents were intimidated. In the House of Assembly, the premier advised union leaders to sever all connections with the CLC, national and international unions.⁹² He warned them to stop all forms of political action and although the Federation refused many other trade unionists heeded the warning. Particularly damaging for the NFL was Smallwood's tactic of encouraging unions to by-pass the NFL and come directly to him if they had a grievance.⁹³ Some did, thus eroding the authority and effectiveness of the Federation with government, the public and business. Business agents

⁸⁹ See Appendix, Table 2.

⁹⁰ See Appendix, Table 2.

⁹¹ "List of Newfoundland Trade Unions and Affiliations, 1958 and 1960" (unpublished), compiled by the author.

⁹² Ed Finn, Jr., "Newfoundland Curbs Unions," p. 1.

⁹³ The Evening Telegram, June 3, 1975.

ran into a hardening of attitudes on the part of employers during negotiations.⁹⁴ As for the IWA, Smallwood made sure they would not succeed at any attempted comeback. When the NBWW proved embarrassingly ineffective the premier arranged a deal in which the NBWW agreed to end its existence in favour of the UBCJ.⁹⁵ After six years of effort and more than a million dollars in expenditure, even the IWA was not up to another head-to-head confrontation that would almost certainly end in failure.

⁹⁴ Chafe, interview, September 1975.

⁹⁵ Smallwood, interview, June 1975.

CHAPTER EIGHT

CONCLUSION

The rift between Smallwood and the Federation was never healed. Smallwood vowed not to accept the Federation's annual brief to government as long as Thoms remained president. The uncompromising Thoms was re-elected to seven consecutive terms and he continued to attack Smallwood's labour legislation, publicly denounce Smallwood as a dictator and urge the Federation to actively support the NDP.¹ But the Federation never seriously challenged Smallwood's power. The anti-labour climate created by the premier put the Labour Movement on the defensive. It drained the energies of the Federation executive to the point that just trying to hold the Federation together consumed almost all their time.² It was not until Smallwood's awesome power began to decline in the late 1960s that the NFL recovered — first with the rise of the Fishermen's Union [NFFAWU] and later the transformation of the NGEA into an effective trade union — the Newfoundland Association of Public Employees [NAPE].

The decline in membership, the loss of influence with government and the consequent loss of public prestige revealed both the strengths and weaknesses of the Federation's historic policy eschewing

¹The Evening Telegram, August 10, 1960.

²Ed Finn, Jr., "Newfoundland Curbs Unions," p.

confrontation. The policy had its roots in the nature of the Newfoundland economy. The economy was based primarily on the fishery, although greater diversification did start towards the end of the nineteenth century. The fishery in turn was dependent on foreign markets and climatic conditions, both of which could (and did) fluctuate wildly. The resulting economic instability created a difficult set of circumstances for the growth of a stable Labour Movement. Workers contemplating the formation of trade unions did so in the face of chronic labour surpluses that provided employers with a pool of willing substitute labour. Furthermore the cyclical nature of the economy caused trade unions to die out and re-form as the economy ebbed and flowed. The progression from rural fishing economy to a level of industrial development sufficient to support a stable Labour Movement was a slow process. Although the first trade unions were formed during the 1850s it was not until 1937 that the first enduring central labour organization was formed. During the intervening period unions sometimes cooperated on specific actions such as strikes and, in fact, on seven separate occasions tried unsuccessfully to form labour centrals. It was not until the NFL was founded in 1937, however, that Newfoundland trade unions coalesced into a true Labour Movement; that is, a group of trade unions or trade unionists working together to spread trade union organization.

The founders of the NFL sensed that they must avoid confrontation if their Movement was to grow and for the most part their strategy worked. The Federation's policy of maintaining a moderate, respectable image made them a difficult target to attack during organizing drives. In a society which placed a high value on respect for law, order

and fair play, the Federation's style earned them a reservoir of good will. In turn, that made it possible for a succession of Federation presidents and executives to spread trade unionism further than even they realized.³ By the late 1940s the per capita level of trade union organization in Newfoundland was higher than in Canada and the United States. It was in the legislative and political activities of the Federation that the weaknesses of the strategy were apparent.

During the tenure of the Commission of Government the Federation was largely unsuccessful in its attempts to have government adopt its legislative program. Under Smallwood, until 1959 at least, the situation was reversed but only because Smallwood was sympathetic to labour unions and responsive to their demands. When he turned on the NFL the NFL was powerless to defend itself. The events set in motion by the IWA strike swept away any illusion the public or Newfoundland trade unionists may have had about the nature of the power held by the NFL. The Federation had power only to the extent the government choose to give it power. And as it had assiduously avoided political involvement, when it came to a battle which required independent political power, the Federation was caught unprepared. The NFL's unpreparedness, however, was not entirely rooted in the instability of the Newfoundland economy. The period from 1940 to 1965 was a period of sustained prosperity and economic growth. If the Federation had chosen to adopt a more aggressive posture with government, either in its public pronouncements or, after 1949, by becoming involved in direct political

³Walter Sparks, interview, June 1975; Cyril Strong, interview, April 1974; Harold Horwood, interview, July 1975; Irving Fogwill, interview, June 1975.

action, the climate was right. As long as there was no system of electoral politics the fact it did not is understandable. But after Confederation in 1949 the Federation failed to appreciate the changed environment that a return to politics had brought. In a system of electoral politics a Labour Movement which chooses to avoid political involvement chooses to go unarmed; an opinion shared by many pre-Confederation trade unionists. The founding of the St. John's District Labour Party and the Newfoundland National Party showed many were inclined to follow the example of the British Trade Union Movement favouring direct political action and perhaps they would have if Newfoundland had opted for Responsible Government. Instead, the existence of a pro-Labour government, combined with internal changes in the Labour Movement caused by Confederation, pushed Labour towards political neutrality. Particularly important were the effects of the merger with the TLC and the absorption of many independent Newfoundland unions by the AFL.

The AFL, and to a lesser degree the TLC, were opposed to direct political action in favour of Gompers style "business unionism." Inevitably, that philosophy carried over into the Federation after Confederation. The organizing drive by the AFL in 1949 brought "business unionism" to Newfoundland on a large scale. The rise of the professional business agent brought increased stability and continuity to many Newfoundland unions, but it also resulted in a decline in rank-and-file participation. Union members began to regard the union's business as the work of their full-time employees not their own. The Federation's decision to become a subsidiary organization of the TLC had a similar effect. Having lost its status as a national labour central with the

power to charter unions, the vibrancy gradually ebbed out of the Federation.

Despite its decline in the 1950s and 1960s, however, the Federation could take pride in a considerable record of achievement. In a shaky, predominantly rural economy the Federation acted as a stabilizing force for the Newfoundland Labour Movement and as a catalyst for the spread of trade union organization. In fact, the NFL was so successful that by the late 1940s there were more organized workers per capita in Newfoundland than either Canada or the United States. Moreover, this achievement was the work of volunteers — men and women who attended to their responsibilities as Federation executives after spending a full day at the office, paper mill or in the rail yard.

Recent history has shown the NFL did recover from its protracted war with Smallwood. The Federation once again exerts a powerful influence on the shape and direction of the province's labour legislation and participates in its implementation. The Federation also appears to have recognized and acted upon its political responsibilities. Even before the CLC's 1978 commitment to work actively towards the election of a New Democratic Party government, the NFL had formed a firm alliance with the provincial NDP. The first results of that alliance were seen in the election of Newfoundland's first NDP member of parliament and the large vote for other Labour-backed candidates in the 1979 federal election. As significant as recent political successes have been, however, the most important achievement of the NFL to date remains the organizing work done from 1937 to 1947. Thousands of unorganized workers were brought into the Trade Union Movement.

Improvements in wages and working conditions were immediate, considerable and lasting. The working people of Newfoundland have often had to settle for less than a fair share from the Newfoundland economy. There is little doubt, however, that much of what they have succeeded in obtaining is directly attributable to the efforts and achievements of the people who created and sustained the Newfoundland Federation of Labour.

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APPENDIX

TABLE 1*

	LOCALS AFFILIATED WITH CANADIAN & AMERICAN- BASED UNIONS	INDEPENDENT NFLD. UNIONS	TOTAL	MEMBERSHIP CANADIAN & AMERICAN- BASED LOCALS	MEMBERSHIP INDEPENDENT NFLD. UNIONS	TOTAL
1933	11	10	21	2,450	4,560	7,010
1934	11	13	24	2,580	5,150	7,730
1935	13	13	26	3,300	5,460	8,760
1936	13	15	28	3,237	14,901	18,138
1937	16	20	36	3,207	15,949	19,156
1938	16	37	53	3,381	20,860	24,244
1939	17	31	48	3,477	20,025	23,502
1940	19	31	50	3,840	20,898	24,738
1941	21	35	56	3,310	23,749	27,059
1942	21	32	53	4,034	25,055	29,089
1943	19	30	49	3,845	25,440	29,285
1944	19	30	49	3,905	26,055	29,960
1945	24	33	57	4,178	27,595	31,773
1946	24	54	78	4,109	34,598	38,707
1947	26	50	76	4,301	38,547	42,848
1948	30	47	77	6,451	33,960	40,411
1949	61	27	88	15,875	25,775	41,650
1950	73	20	93	17,239	20,189	39,189
1951	83	24	107	18,341	20,587	38,928
1952	91	21	112	19,355	19,085	39,440
1953	92	20	112	19,709	19,655	39,364
1954	101	19	120	19,864	19,105	38,969
1955	110	19	129	20,986	18,945	39,931
1956	112	15	127	21,482	20,052	41,534
1957	109	15	124	23,332	15,975	39,307
1958	109	12	121	25,003	8,200	33,203
1959	113	9	122	21,607	10,575	32,182
1960	108	8	117	19,269	18,875	38,144
1961	102	8	110	20,001	18,900	38,901
1962	102	7	109	32,267	6,505	38,762
1963	110	10	120	29,460	7,377	36,837

continued...

TABLE 1...continued

*The figures contained in Tables 1, 2, 3 are calculated from statistics compiled by the author from over 400 citations collected from separate sources. Until 1942 there was no one department of government charged with the sole responsibility of dealing with matters pertaining to Labour. In 1942, however, a full-time Labour Relations Officer was appointed in the Department of Public Utilities but even then the pressures of his position left him with little time to collect statistics on the development of the country's labour unions. Not until 1949, when Newfoundland joined the Dominion of Canada, were Newfoundland labour statistics compiled in a systematic consistent fashion. It has been necessary, therefore, for the author to entirely reconstruct such statistics for the years 1933-1949 from a variety of primary and secondary sources including newspapers, magazines, union minute books, government reports, private correspondence, labour convention reports and so on. This process has necessarily involved a certain degree of subjective reasoning. For example, it has sometimes been difficult to determine when some unions ceased to exist. Moreover, when figures on the membership of a particular union have been unavailable for certain years it has been necessary to extrapolate figures for those years. Obviously such a method of compilation is open to error but in the circumstances the only other alternative was to treat this problem as insoluble. It has been gratifying to note, however, that on the three occasions the Labour Relations Office did attempt to determine the number of trade unions in the country and their total membership, the figures compiled by the author were within five percent of those published by the LRO. Figures for total trade union membership, number of trade unions, number of national unions, number of international unions, number of unions in the NFL, and number of unions outside the NFL are listed in the Appendix, Tables 1, 2, 3. When making statements such as the assertion that "only twenty percent" of the representatives of the organized work force attended the first NFL convention it has not been possible for the reasons cited above to quote secondary or even primary sources. This and other similar figures in this thesis have been calculated from the raw data described above. To list all the sources for each figure and how each figure was determined in each footnote would, of course, be impossible. Therefore, when these figures are quoted the footnote will read "Calculated from the raw data by the author."

TABLE 2

	NUMBER OF NFL UNIONS	NUMBER OF NON-NFL UNIONS	TOTAL	MEMBERSHIP NFL UNIONS	MEMBERSHIP NON-NFL UNIONS	TOTAL
1936	7	21	28	2,902	15,236	18,138
1937	10	26	36	3,388	15,768	19,156
1938	30	23	53	7,814	16,430	24,244
1939	25	23	48	7,203	16,299	23,502
1940	26	24	50	7,288	17,450	25,738
1941	23	33	56	7,105	19,954	27,059
1942	27	26	53	8,149	20,940	29,089
1943	25	24	49	7,465	21,820	29,285
1944	23	26	49	7,120	22,840	29,960
1945	34	23	57	9,153	22,620	31,773
1946	50	28	78	13,724	24,983	38,707
1947	46	30	76	13,470	29,378	42,848
1948	47	30	77	10,171	30,340	40,411
1949	52	36	88	13,551	28,099	41,650
1950	49	44	93	19,498	19,691	39,189
1951	59	48	107	19,006	19,922	38,928
1952	61	51	112	18,507	19,943	38,440
1953	66	46	112	20,774	18,590	39,364
1954	70	50	120	21,779	17,190	38,969
1955	70	59	129	20,139	19,792	39,931
1956	75	52	127	23,489	18,075	41,534
1957	74	50	124	20,063	19,244	39,307
1958	73	48	121	22,328	10,875	33,203
1959	74	48	122	15,560	16,622	32,182
1960	71	46	117	13,736	24,408	38,144
1961	63	47	110	14,210	24,691	38,901
1962	62	47	109	13,378	25,389	38,762
1963	61	59	120	12,476	24,361	36,837

TABLE 3
STRIKES AND LOCKOUTS IN NEWFOUNDLAND, 1936-1972

	NUMBER OF WORK STOPPAGES	WORKERS INVOLVED	DURATION IN MAN-DAYS
1936	2	620	1,000
1937	6	2,850	14,050
1938	7	809	6,360
1939	4	1,450	2,350
1940	2	522	566
1941	10	4,400	31,180
1942	4	1,765	2,500
1943	3	1,100	1,300
1944	7	2,211	11,733
1945	3	1,780	1,740
1946	7	560	560
1947	8	2,860	26,280
1948	8	5,350	118,450
1949	6	2,520	25,485
1950	6	2,636	33,258
1951	6	3,196	24,280
1952	9	1,859	10,330
1953	2	592	2,350
1954	5	519	11,320
1955	5	852	19,060
1956	8	1,272	5,590
1957	6	571	27,450
1958	7	3,081	23,550
1959	3	2,888	177,460
1960	7	2,082	7,490
1961	5	238	1,810
1962	2	199	1,760
1963	9	741	8,490
1964	1	30	1,070
1965	4	774	2,110
1966	10	2,657	22,260
1967	9	1,679	8,660
1968	9	1,850	24,490
1969	8	3,890	168,130
1970	8	881	2,630
1971	40	7,503	179,176
1972	50	11,601	272,422

TABLE 4
POPULATION FOURTEEN AND OVER IN TRADE UNIONS

YEAR	CANADA			NEWFOUNDLAND		
	POPULATION 14 & OVER	UNION MEMBERSHIP	%	POPULATION 14 & OVER	UNION MEMBERSHIP*	%
1936	7,754,000	323,000	4.2	173,000	17,600	10.2
1937	7,876,00	383,000	4.9	175,000	18,000	10.3
1938	8,004,000	382,000	4.8	177,000	23,000	13.0
1939	8,131,000	359,000	4.4	178,700	22,300	12.5
1940	8,247,000	362,000	4.4	180,500	23,400	13.0
1941	8,352,000	462,000	5.5	182,300	25,700	14.1
1942	8,477,000	578,000	6.8	184,100	27,700	15.0
1943	8,587,000	665,000	7.7	186,000	27,800	14.9
1944	8,699,000	724,000	8.3	187,800	28,400	15.1
1945	8,784,000	711,000	8.1	190,800	31,100	16.3
1946	8,981,000	832,000	9.3	191,500	37,100	19.4
1947	9,030,000	912,000	10.1	192,100	41,200	21.4
1948	9,158,000	978,000	10.7	192,600	38,800	20.1
1949	9,296,000	1,006,000	10.8	228,000	40,000	17.5
1950	9,657,00	**		227,000	38,900	17.1
1951	9,764,000	1,029,000	10.5	226,000	37,300	16.5
1952	10,028,000	1,146,000	11.4	232,000	36,700	15.8
1953	10,231,000	1,220,000	11.9	237,000	36,200	15.3
1954	10,475,000	1,268,000	12.1	243,000	37,200	15.3
1955	10,689,000	1,268,000	11.9	247,000	36,800	14.9
1956	10,888,000	1,352,000	12.4	252,000	37,600	14.9
1957	11,183,000	1,386,000	12.4	257,000	39,000	15.2
1958	11,452,000	1,454,000	12.7	263,000	36,800	14.0
1959	11,651,000	1,459,000	12.5	269,000	30,700	11.4
1960	11,879,000	1,459,000	12.3	276,000	29,700	10.8
1961	12,053,000	1,447,000	12.0	284,000	35,600	12.5
1962	12,280,000	1,449,000	11.8	292,000	36,400	12.5
1963	12,536,000	1,449,000	11.5	302,000	36,300	12.0

*Excludes teachers' and fishermen's organizations.

**Data not published by Urquhart & Buckley because of a change in dating.

SOURCES: Canadian figures: Urquhart & Buckley, Statistics.
Newfoundland figures: Newfoundland Census, 1936-1963 and
Table 1 rounded to nearest hundred.



